

The Impact of Trade Unionism on Staff Welfare in Nigerian Public Institutions: A Focus on Akwa Ibom State University (AKSU)



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ABSTRACT: Public institutions in Nigeria, including universities, had long faced persistent challenges related to staff welfare, such as poor working conditions, inadequate remuneration, and limited career advancement opportunities. These issues had led to frequent industrial actions and strained relationships between university management and staff unions. This study investigated the impact of trade unionism on staff welfare in Nigerian public institutions, with a particular focus on Akwa Ibom State University (AKSU). The study addressed three main objectives: examining the effect of trade union activities on working conditions and benefits at AKSU, assessing the relationship between lobbying efforts and staff welfare, and evaluating the impact of strikes on staff welfare at the university. The findings revealed that trade union activities significantly impacted the working conditions and benefits of employees at AKSU. Unionized staff reported better access to resources, improved remuneration, and more favorable working environments compared to their non-unionized counterparts. The study also found a positive relationship between lobbying and staff welfare in AKSU, as effective lobbying efforts by trade unions contributed to the implementation of policies and programs that enhanced staff welfare, such as salary reviews and career development opportunities. The study concluded that trade unionism played a vital role in shaping staff welfare in Nigerian public institutions, as exemplified by the case of Akwa Ibom State University (AKSU). The findings highlighted the importance of constructive engagement between university management and trade unions to address staff welfare concerns and foster a conducive work environment. The study recommended that the university management and the state government establish regular dialogue and collaborative platforms with trade unions to address staff welfare issues proactively. AKSU should also develop comprehensive staff welfare programs that address the diverse needs of its academic and non-academic staff and strengthen its internal dispute resolution mechanisms to minimize the frequency and impact of strikes.

KEYWORDS: Trade Unionism, Staff Welfare, Akwa Ibom State University (AKSU), Working Conditions, Employee Benefits, Lobbying and Strikes

INTRODUCTION

Trade unions have historically played a crucial role in advocating for workers' rights and enhancing working conditions around the world. In Nigeria, trade unionism has been a prominent aspect of the labor landscape, particularly in the public sector, where unions have significantly contributed to negotiating better conditions for employees and shaping labor policies (Nwankwo, 2017). The development of trade unions in Nigeria began in the early 20th century, marked by the establishment of organizations such as the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) and various sector-specific unions. These entities have been instrumental in addressing workers' grievances, negotiating wages, and advocating for improvements in staff welfare (Okeke, 2020). Staff welfare encompassing health benefits, job security, working conditions, and career development remains a critical focus area in public institutions. Effective staff welfare programs are essential for ensuring high levels of employee satisfaction, productivity, and overall institutional performance. However, in Nigerian public institutions, the provision of adequate welfare services has frequently been hampered by financial constraints, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and political interference (Ibrahim & Bamidele, 2019).

The interplay between trade unionism and staff welfare in Nigerian public institutions is complex and multifaceted. On one hand, trade unions are tasked with representing the interests of their members and negotiating improvements in welfare provisions. On the other hand, the effectiveness of these unions can be hindered by various factors, including internal disunity, limited bargaining power, and resistance from government and institutional management (Afolabi, 2018). In recent years, there has been increasing concern about the adequacy of trade union efforts in addressing the welfare needs of public sector employees. Reports have highlighted issues such as inadequate health coverage, poor working conditions, and insufficient career development opportunities

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within public institutions (Alabi, 2021). These challenges underscore the need for a comprehensive evaluation of the role of trade unions in promoting staff welfare and the impact of their advocacy on policy and practice.

Understanding the historical context, current challenges, and the role of trade unions in shaping staff welfare policies is crucial for identifying strategies to enhance the effectiveness of trade unionism in Nigeria's public sector. This study aims to explore these dimensions, providing insights into how trade unions can better advocate for staff welfare and contribute to improved working conditions in Nigerian public institutions.

Statement of the Problem

In Nigerian public institutions, the relationship between trade unionism and staff welfare faces numerous challenges that impede effective advocacy and the improvement of working conditions. Although trade unions are crucial in representing workers' interests and negotiating for better terms, their effectiveness in addressing employees' welfare needs is frequently questioned. A significant issue is the internal disunity and fragmentation within trade unions themselves, along with their insufficient bargaining power, which often undermines their ability to advocate successfully for enhanced working conditions and benefits. Consequently, public sector employees may encounter delays or inadequacies in the improvements to their welfare provisions.

Moreover, staff welfare provisions in Nigerian public institutions are often criticized for being inadequate. Employees face issues such as insufficient health insurance, poor working conditions, low job security, and limited opportunities for career development. These challenges are exacerbated by bureaucratic inefficiencies and financial constraints within the public sector, which hinder the effective implementation of welfare policies. As a result, employees' welfare needs may remain unmet, despite the efforts of trade unions. Political interference and bureaucratic inefficiencies introduce additional complexity to this issue. Trade unions often encounter resistance from government and institutional management, obstructing their efforts to advocate for improved staff welfare. This external pressure leads to conflicts and diminishes the unions' capacity to effect meaningful change. Thus, the interplay between trade unions and public sector administrators becomes a critical factor influencing the quality and timeliness of welfare provisions.

Given these challenges, there is a clear need for a comprehensive evaluation of the role of trade unions in promoting staff welfare within Nigerian public institutions. Understanding the barriers faced by trade unions and identifying areas for improvement in welfare provisions are essential for developing effective strategies to enhance employee satisfaction and institutional performance. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the effectiveness of trade unions in advocating for staff welfare and evaluating the impact of their efforts on policy and practice. The main aim of the study is to examine the impact of trade unionism on staff welfare of the Nigerian institutions with particular reference to Akwa Ibom State University (AKSU). Specifically, the study seeks achieve the following:

- a) To investigate the extent to which trade union activities impact on the working conditions and benefits of employees at Akwa Ibom State University (AKSU)
- b) To assess the relationship between lobbying and staff welfare in Akwa Ibom State University (AKSU)
- c) To examine effects of strikes on staff welfare in Akwa Ibom State University (AKSU)

Conceptual Framework

A comprehensive understanding of this study may be abstruse without an explanation of the basic concepts involved. These key concepts include trade unionism and employees' or staff welfare, both of which form the foundation for exploring the intricate relationship between labor movements and the well-being of workers in public institutions.

Concept of Trade Unionism

Trade unionism involves the collective organization of employees into unions that advocate for their interests and engage in negotiations with employers to secure improved wages, working conditions, and benefits. Over time, this concept has been influenced by various historical, social, and economic developments. Trade unions are formal entities that represent workers' rights, serve as protectors of their interests, and mediate between employees and employers on matters such as pay, working hours, and other employment conditions (Nwankwo, 2017).

In Nigeria, trade unions have played a crucial role in shaping labor policies and championing workers' rights, particularly within the public sector. Organizations like the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) have led several labor movements, including strikes and demonstrations aimed at enhancing the welfare of public sector workers (Okeke, 2020). Nigerian trade unionism is defined by a strong focus on unity, collective bargaining, and the pursuit of social equity for employees. This collective approach allows workers to combine their resources and numbers, creating leverage to exert pressure on employers and government bodies (Afolabi, 2018).

However, trade unions in Nigeria face several obstacles. Internal divisions, political meddling, and limited bargaining strength frequently reduce the effectiveness of unions in achieving their goals. These challenges call for a deeper analysis of trade unions'

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role in promoting employee welfare, especially in Nigerian public institutions where bureaucratic hurdles and financial limitations are widespread (Ibrahim & Bamidele, 2019).

Employees/Staff Welfare

Employees' or staff welfare refers to the range of services, benefits, and facilities provided by employers to promote the well-being of their workforce. These can include provisions such as health insurance, retirement plans, housing, transportation, and recreational amenities, along with programs that support work-life balance, job security, and career advancement (Armstrong, 2014). Staff welfare is a vital aspect of human resource management, directly influencing employee satisfaction, productivity, and overall organizational effectiveness. Stratton (2015) defined employee welfare programs as the efforts aimed at ensuring the good fortune, health, happiness, and prosperity of individuals or groups. Welfare includes both financial and non-financial support provided by organizations or government entities to improve employees' well-being.

In Nigerian public institutions, staff welfare remains a significant concern due to the inadequacy of provisions available to employees. Workers in the public sector often encounter challenges such as limited health coverage, substandard working conditions, and restricted professional development opportunities (Alabi, 2021). These issues are compounded by bureaucratic inefficiencies and financial constraints common in public institutions, resulting in widespread dissatisfaction and a lack of motivation among employees. The role of trade unions in advocating for better staff welfare is therefore crucial. These unions are responsible for negotiating with employers to secure improved benefits and working conditions for employees. However, their success is frequently hindered by internal conflicts and external resistance from both employers and government bodies (Nwankwo, 2017).

Understanding staff welfare also requires acknowledging the broader socio-economic and political factors that impact public institutions. Elements such as government policies, economic conditions, and labor laws significantly influence the extent of welfare provisions available to employees (Ibrahim & Bamidele, 2019). Thus, this study aims to examine how effectively trade unions can promote staff welfare within the complex and challenging environment of Nigerian public institutions.

Empirical Review

In Nigeria, series of empirical studies have been conducted to explore the impact of trade unionism on organizational productivity, employee welfare, and efficiency across various sectors. These studies offer valuable insights into the dynamics of labor relations and their implications for both workers and employers. Empirical reviews on the study of trade unionism and staff welfare in Akwa Ibom State University (AKSU) provide valuable insights into the relationship between labor representation and the well-being of employees.

In their 2020 study, Ebong, Osezua, Ogbise, and Oki conducted a study on leadership Challenges and Labour Performance in Organizations. A Study of Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) (2015-2019) the study emphasized that the role of labor unions in enhancing organizational performance is critical. This assertion serves as the foundation for the establishment of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC). The success of any significant organization is closely linked to purposeful leadership, defined as the capacity of individuals or groups to inspire confidence and respect, effectively guiding their followers. Such leaders have historically played vital roles in the socio-economic advancement of their unions. However, the NLC currently faces significant challenges that severely impact its organizational performance. Key issues include a lack of public trust, corruption, political interference, incompetence, and insufficient transparency and accountability. At the federal, state, and local levels, union leadership often lacks the necessary skills, integrity, and openness required to motivate and lead diverse and independent teams. These shortcomings negatively affect their overall effectiveness and undermine the union's core objectives. To ground their findings scientifically, the study adopted transformational leadership theory as its theoretical framework. The research methodology was qualitative and descriptive, utilizing secondary sources such as textbooks, journals, newspapers, and internet resources related to the topic. The study's findings revealed that (i) the leadership within the NLC is problematic, with many leaders lacking effective styles necessary for managing union affairs, resulting in the misappropriation of resources for personal gain; and (ii) political interference from government officials significantly undermines leadership performance, restricting labor members' autonomy in decision-making. Based on these insights, the authors recommend that the government foster an enabling environment to improve union performance in Nigeria and that NLC leaders at all levels distance themselves from political activities to ensure independent decision-making regarding union matters.

Marcus, Kabiru, Solomon, and Akhimien (2016) conducted a comparative study on the impact of trade unionism on academic performance and development in Nigerian universities. The study highlights that labor disputes are frequent in Nigeria, with the right to trade unionism often misused. These abuses and conflicts lead to reduced productivity, negatively affecting the country's economic supply and demand. Instead of engaging in proper negotiations, unions often resort to strikes as their first action, which disrupts industrial harmony and academic activities in Nigerian universities. The research aimed to compare Nigerian private and public universities to determine whether non-unionized environments contribute to better industrial peace, academic performance, and productivity. This descriptive study followed an empirical case study approach, primarily using secondary data analyzed through content analysis. The findings showed a significant relationship between non-trade unionism and industrial peace,

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academic success, and productivity, particularly in private universities. Unlike public universities, where unionism often disrupts academic activities, private institutions maintain stability, enhancing students' academic performance. The study concluded that regulated or non-trade unionism promotes industrial peace, which is essential for high academic performance and productivity. It recommended that while the right to association is fundamental, private universities should continue recognizing staff associations but regulate them, preventing them from joining national unions to avoid frequent strikes. Furthermore, the establishment of labor management dispute committees in all Nigerian universities was suggested to handle union issues internally, thus promoting higher productivity.

Tom and Emmanuel (2024) conducted a study on the impact of trade unionism on the welfare of members of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) at the University of Uyo, focusing on the period from 2010 to 2020. The study was prompted by the poor welfare conditions prevalent in Nigeria's public university system, particularly as they affect ASUU members at the University of Uyo. The research aimed to evaluate the extent to which ASUU's activities have contributed to the promotion of its members and to examine the union's role in securing fringe benefits for them. Conflict Theory served as the study's theoretical framework. The research employed a survey method, gathering data through structured questionnaires and interviews. A sample of 301 respondents was selected from the population using simple random sampling. Data were drawn from both primary and secondary sources, and the study used a one-way ANOVA statistical method to test its two hypotheses. The findings revealed that there was no significant relationship between trade unionism and the promotion of ASUU members. Additionally, no link was found between unionism in ASUU and the payment of fringe benefits to its members at the University of Uyo. Based on these results, the study recommended that ASUU should develop a more effective collaboration with the university management to ensure timely promotions. Furthermore, the union should establish a clear framework to guide the payment of fringe benefits and encourage members to join the Uniuyo Academic Staff Multipurpose Co-operative Society for enhanced welfare benefits.

The study by Orji, Ringim., Boman., and Emmanuel (2016) explores the impact of trade unionism on academic performance and development in Nigerian universities, using a comparative approach. It examines how frequent labor disputes, stemming from the abuse of trade union rights, negatively affect productivity, industrial harmony, and academic activities, particularly in public universities. The research compares private and public universities to assess the relationship between non-trade unionism, industrial peace, academic performance, and overall institutional productivity. The study adopted a descriptive research design, utilizing secondary data analyzed through content analysis. Findings revealed a significant positive correlation between non-unionized environments in private universities and improved academic performance and productivity, in contrast to public institutions frequently disrupted by union activities. The study concluded that regulated unionism fosters industrial peace, which is crucial for academic success, and recommended that private universities should continue recognizing staff associations while limiting their participation in national unions to prevent strike actions. Furthermore, it suggested the creation of internal labor management committees in universities to resolve disputes and enhance productivity.

Saliu (2019) conducted a study on students' perceptions of the impact of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) industrial actions on the development of Nigerian public universities, with a focus on the University of Ibadan. The study employed a descriptive survey research design and selected a sample size of 392 participants using the Yaro Yamane formula (1992). Data were gathered through a questionnaire and analyzed using mean computation and standard deviation. The findings indicated that ASUU strikes had moderate positive impacts on university development, with a mean score of 2.89. These functional impacts included compelling the government to take necessary actions for university improvement and exposing the poor state of facilities. However, the study also revealed significant negative effects, with a mean score of 3.41. These dysfunctional impacts included disruptions to the academic calendar, prolonging students' time on campus, and damaging the reputation of the university system. The study concluded that for Nigerian public universities to operate efficiently, the adverse effects of ASUU industrial actions must be effectively minimized.

Bunmi and Bekithemba (2019) conducted a study examining the relationship between trade union activities and the management of tertiary institutions in Nigeria, aiming to provide empirical solutions to the ongoing industrial actions by staff unions. The research focused on tertiary institutions in Ekiti State, Nigeria, with a sample of 450 participants, comprising 390 union members selected using proportionate sampling techniques and 60 top management staff selected purposively. Two self-designed instruments, the "Trade Unions and Management of Tertiary Institutions Questionnaire" (TUMTIQ) and the "Management of Tertiary Institutions Questionnaire" (MTIQ), were used to collect data. The face and content validity of the instruments were verified by the researchers and another expert in educational management. Reliability was assessed using the test-retest method, yielding coefficients of 0.66 and 0.72. Data analysis involved both descriptive and inferential statistics, with three hypotheses tested at a 0.05 significance level. The study revealed a significant relationship between trade union activities and the leadership style employed by tertiary institution management. Additionally, there was a significant relationship between union dissatisfaction with conditions of service and management practices. The study recommended that the management of tertiary institutions adopt an inclusive, participatory leadership style. Furthermore, it suggested that the government should provide funding to improve conditions of service, such as better salaries, in-service training, overseas trips, and enhanced welfare packages for staff.

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Ortisa Gabriel Mhenbee and Chafa N. (2019) conducted a study on the intersection of politics and trade unionism in higher education in Nigeria. The paper defines politics as the exercise of power, authority, and control, focusing on public interest, institutional legitimacy, and accountability for the collective benefit of members. It also highlights trade unionism as an organization dedicated to securing better wages and working conditions, aiming to improve the social status and standard of living for its members. The paper explores the role of politics and trade unions in Nigerian higher institutions, observing that unions typically base their demands on adequate funding for the education system, institutional autonomy, academic freedom, as well as fair salaries and working conditions. The implications of the influence of politics and trade unionism on higher education in Nigeria are also discussed. The paper suggests several key recommendations: appointments to governing councils should be made based on merit rather than political or ethnic considerations, and adequate funding should be provided to help institutions meet their educational objectives. Additionally, staff unions are encouraged to exercise restraint in their demands and actions.

Emmanuel, Lolo, and Gamaliel (2018) conducted a study on the impact of unionism on workplace efficiency in federal universities in southern Nigeria. The research adopted a descriptive survey design, with 540 out of 600 distributed questionnaires returned. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, including total score and simple percentages, while hypotheses were tested using the chi-square test at a 5% significance level. The findings revealed that federal universities were generally inefficient in their operations, with union activities significantly disrupting the smooth functioning of these institutions. The tested hypotheses showed that key university activities, such as matriculation and convocation, were often delayed. Additionally, public perception of union activities in universities was largely negative and discouraging. The study noted that the accreditation process was the only area where efficiency was observed. Based on these findings, the study recommended that the frequency of strikes and "work to rule" actions by unions be significantly reduced and used only as a last resort. Furthermore, it suggested that public-private partnerships should be encouraged in federal universities, with government ownership maintained at 50-70% to help reduce bureaucratic inefficiencies.

Trade Union and Workers' Welfare in Nigeria: Akwa Ibom State University Experience

Trade unions play a vital role in advocating for workers' rights and welfare in Nigeria, a country with a sizable labor force. These unions act as a collective voice for employees, negotiating improved wages, better working conditions, and other benefits with employers and the government. The relationship between trade unions and workers' welfare in Nigeria is complex, involving multiple dimensions of labor rights and social justice. Historically, Nigerian trade unions have been instrumental in addressing issues such as unfair labor practices, workplace discrimination, and inadequate safety standards. Through collective bargaining and negotiations, unions work to ensure employers comply with labor laws and maintain safe, conducive working environments. This includes advocating for the enforcement of occupational health and safety regulations to reduce workplace accidents and injuries (Ojo & Amoo, 2019).

The significance of trade unions, particularly the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and the Non-Academic Staff Union (NASU), in tackling various labor-related challenges faced by university employees is undeniable. These challenges include unfair labor practices, discrimination, and safety concerns within educational institutions. ASUU and NASU, representing academic and non-academic staff respectively, act as key defenders of workers' rights, engaging in negotiations with university management to enforce labor standards and ensure compliance with labor laws (Akpan, 2018).

ASUU and NASU play a pivotal role in advocating for fair and equitable treatment of university staff within AKSU. Through the mechanism of collective bargaining, these unions tirelessly negotiate with university management to ensure the creation of safe and conducive working environments for all employees. This includes pressing for adherence to occupational health and safety regulations to mitigate workplace hazards and prevent accidents. By addressing safety concerns, ASUU and NASU contribute to fostering a work environment where employees feel secure and valued, thereby enhancing overall productivity and well-being. Moreover, ASUU and NASU serve as critical advocates against workplace discrimination within AKSU. They work diligently to combat any form of discrimination based on factors such as gender, ethnicity, religion, or political affiliation. Through proactive measures and advocacy campaigns, these unions strive to create an inclusive and equitable workplace where every employee is treated with dignity and respect. By championing diversity and inclusivity, ASUU and NASU contribute to fostering a positive organizational culture that values the contributions of all staff members regardless of background or identity (Akpan, 2018).

The efforts of trade unions in AKSU extend beyond economic matters to encompass broader social issues that impact workers' welfare. ASUU and NASU often operate welfare schemes and programs aimed at providing financial assistance, medical care, and educational support to their members and their families. These initiatives are designed to alleviate socio-economic hardships and enhance the holistic welfare of university staff, fostering a sense of solidarity and support within the academic community. One example of such initiatives is the provision of scholarships or bursaries by trade unions to support the education of members' children. Additionally, trade unions may organize medical outreach programs or facilitate access to affordable healthcare services for university staff and their families. By addressing the socio-economic needs of employees, trade unions contribute to creating a supportive and inclusive work environment within AKSU, thereby promoting overall well-being and job satisfaction among university staff (Akpan, 2019).

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The importance of trade unions in advocating for economic justice and addressing social issues within AKSU is underscored by their commitment to advancing the interests of workers and promoting a fair and equitable workplace. Through collective action and solidarity, ASUU and NASU play a vital role in shaping policies and practices that enhance the welfare of university staff and contribute to building a more just and inclusive society. By participating in labor forums at both national and regional levels, trade unions in AKSU ensure that the voices of university staff are heard in the policymaking process. They advocate for the implementation of policies that guarantee fundamental labor rights, including the right to organize, engage in collective bargaining, and enjoy decent working conditions. Through their advocacy efforts, trade unions seek to influence policymakers to prioritize the welfare of university workers and enact laws that protect their rights and interests (Akpan, 2019)

Strike and Staff Welfare in Akwa Ibom State University (AKSU)

Strikes have become a recurring phenomenon in Nigeria's higher education sector, particularly in public universities like State owned University. These industrial actions, often led by unions such as the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and the Non-Academic Staff Union (NASU), typically arise from unresolved grievances related to staff welfare. The repercussions of these strikes are far-reaching, affecting the university's operations and significantly influencing the well-being and morale of employees, as well as the academic calendar.

At Akwa Ibom State University (AKSU), as in many Nigerian universities, strikes are primarily triggered by issues concerning staff welfare. Key among these are delayed salary payments, inadequate funding for academic programs and infrastructure, limited career advancement opportunities, and insufficient benefits such as health insurance and housing. A significant cause of unrest has been the irregular payment of salaries, which has frequently pushed staff into industrial action, pressuring the university administration and state government to meet their financial obligations (Ogunyemi, 2020). A prominent instance occurred in 2017 when ASUU AKSU initiated a strike due to the continued non-payment of salaries and allowances. Despite assurances from both the university and the state government, the backlog of unpaid salaries mounted, placing immense financial strain on staff members. This strike lasted several weeks and resulted in a partial payment of the arrears, though salary issues persisted in the years that followed (Ita, 2019).

In addition to salary concerns, the failure to honor agreements between the government and trade unions is another major catalyst for strikes. These agreements, often centered around staff welfare, include promises of salary increases, improved working conditions, and enhanced funding for university operations. When these agreements are neglected, staff frustration escalates, leading to strike actions (Usoro, 2021). For instance, in 2021, university staff once again went on strike after the state government failed to fulfill its commitment to improving working conditions, which included providing essential teaching and research resources.

The impact of strikes on staff welfare in AKSU is multifaceted. On the one hand, strikes serve as a tool for staff to press for better welfare conditions. Through industrial action, staff unions have historically secured concessions from the university administration and the government, such as payment of backlogged salaries, improved health benefits, and infrastructural development (Ita, 2019). For instance, after a prolonged strike in 2018, the university management agreed to increase funding for academic research and provided improved health insurance coverage for staff. These improvements contributed positively to the welfare of staff, enhancing job satisfaction and motivation. On the other hand, frequent strikes can have adverse effects on staff welfare. Prolonged industrial actions disrupt academic calendars, leading to job insecurity and financial instability for many staff members, particularly those on contract or temporary employment. The uncertainty created by strikes can also erode staff morale and reduce their commitment to the institution (Ekpo, 2022). For example, during the 2022 strike, many contract staff members faced financial hardship as they were not paid during the strike period, leading to increased anxiety and dissatisfaction among the workforce.

Moreover, the reputational damage inflicted on the university during strike periods leads to decreased enrollment, further straining the financial resources available for staff welfare. The 2019 strike, for example, resulted in a significant drop in student enrollment for the subsequent academic year, as prospective students and their parents sought more stable institutions. This decline in enrollment led to reduced revenue for the university, which in turn affected the funding available for staff welfare initiatives (Udofia, 2020). Despite the challenges, trade unions at AKSU remain a vital force in the struggle for better staff welfare. They continue to engage in dialogue with university management and the government, seeking to address the root causes of strikes and find sustainable solutions to welfare issues. For instance, in 2023, ASUU AKSU successfully negotiated with the state government for a more regularized salary payment schedule, which has helped to reduce the frequency of salary-related strikes (Asuquo, 2023).

Lobbying and Staff Welfare in Akwa Ibom State University (AKSU)

Akwa Ibom State University (AKSU), similar to other public universities in Nigeria, has been grappling with various challenges concerning staff welfare. Lobbying has emerged as a critical tool in addressing these issues within the institution. The relationship between lobbying efforts and improvements in staff welfare is an important aspect of labor relations in the university setting. Staff welfare in Nigerian universities, including AKSU, involves a broad spectrum of concerns such as timely salary disbursement, career advancement, adequate working conditions, and access to research grants (Asuquo et al., 2017). These factors

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have a direct impact on the morale, job satisfaction, and overall performance of academic and non-academic personnel. At AKSU, the state of staff welfare has consistently been a source of tension between staff unions and university management.

Lobbying, as a strategic method to influence decisions and policies, has been used by stakeholders at AKSU to address welfare challenges. Unions like the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and the Non-Academic Staff Union (NASU) have actively engaged in lobbying to push for improvements in pay and working conditions. These lobbying efforts often include direct discussions with university administrators, formal requests to the state government, and at times, industrial actions to reinforce their demands. At AKSU, lobbying has played a significant role in securing improvements for staff welfare. For instance, in 2019, ASUU AKSU's persistent lobbying led to an agreement for a salary increase and the gradual settlement of outstanding salary arrears for academic staff. This outcome was the result of multiple negotiations with the university's management, coupled with formal petitions to the state government that emphasized the financial difficulties faced by staff due to salary delays. The phased payment of arrears eased the financial pressure on staff members (Akpan & Edet, 2019).

Another example of successful lobbying within AKSU is the regularization of promotion exercises for academic and non-academic staff. Prior to these efforts, promotions were often delayed due to bureaucratic bottlenecks and inadequate funding. However, through persistent lobbying and dialogue, the unions were able to secure a commitment from the university management to conduct timely promotions based on merit. This development has had a positive impact on staff morale and has encouraged greater productivity and dedication to duty (Udofia & Akpan, 2020). Despite these successes, the effectiveness of lobbying in improving staff welfare at AKSU has been mixed. One of the major challenges is the limited financial resources available to the university. This financial constraint is exacerbated by broader economic challenges at the state and national levels, which often result in budget cuts and delays in the disbursement of funds allocated to public universities. As a result, even when agreements are reached through lobbying, their implementation is frequently hindered by a lack of adequate funding (Ubi & Efiog, 2018). For instance, although the 2019 salary increment was agreed upon, the university struggled to maintain consistent payments, leading to renewed tensions between staff unions and management.

While lobbying has played a significant role in addressing staff welfare issues at Akwa Ibom State University, its long-term effectiveness remains a subject of debate. Lobbying efforts by staff unions have secured important gains, such as salary increments and timely promotions. However, these efforts are often limited by financial constraints and the absence of systemic reforms. To achieve sustainable improvements in staff welfare, a more holistic approach that combines strategic lobbying with institutional reforms and increased funding is necessary. This approach would not only address immediate welfare concerns but also create a more resilient and supportive environment for staff at AKSU.

Trade Union Activities and Working Conditions in Akwa Ibom State University (AKSU)

Since its establishment in 2010, trade union activities have played a pivotal role in shaping the working conditions at Akwa Ibom State University (AKSU). Similar to other public universities in Nigeria, AKSU has experienced continuous interactions between staff unions and the university administration, primarily focused on enhancing working conditions and staff welfare. The main unions at AKSU include the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), the Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU), and the Non-Academic Staff Union of Educational and Associated Institutions (NASU). These unions have been key advocates for better wages, improved working conditions, and overall staff welfare (Okafor & Akinwale, 2016).

A major issue repeatedly raised by trade unions at AKSU is the delay in salary payments. Problems with late salaries and unpaid allowances have led to several instances of industrial action. For example, in 2020, ASUU-AKSU participated in a nationwide strike protesting the implementation of the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPPIS) and pushing for the government to meet prior agreements (Ukpong, 2020). Similar to other public universities in Nigeria, AKSU's working environment has been affected by inadequate infrastructure, insufficient research funding, and a high student-to-staff ratio, all of which unions have actively lobbied to improve. According to a study by Etuk et al. (2018), the physical work environment at AKSU significantly affects staff satisfaction and productivity, emphasizing the importance of union efforts to address these concerns. In addition to working conditions, trade unions have consistently addressed issues related to career growth and staff development. They have advocated for regular promotion exercises, more training opportunities, and the fair application of academic policies. However, as noted by Akpan and Ekpenyong (2019), financial limitations and bureaucratic challenges have sometimes hindered the effectiveness of these efforts.

Despite these challenges, trade union activities have yielded some positive outcomes. For example, persistent negotiations led to the implementation of a new salary structure for academic staff in 2019, although the full implementation remains a point of contention (Edem, 2019). Additionally, union pressure has resulted in increased attention to staff welfare issues by the university management and the state government. However, the relationship between trade unions and the university management has not always been smooth. Instances of disagreements and industrial actions have occasionally disrupted academic activities. A study by Umoren and Bassey (2020) suggested that while trade union activities have been crucial in advocating for staff rights, there is a need for more collaborative approaches to address working condition issues without resorting to strikes. In a nutshell, trade union activities have significantly influenced working conditions in AKSU. While challenges persist, the unions continue to play a vital

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role in advocating for improved working environments, better remuneration, and enhanced staff welfare. Moving forward, there is a need for sustained dialogue between unions, university management, and government stakeholders to address ongoing concerns and create a more conducive working environment at AKSU.

Theoretical Framework

To give the work a scientific base, the researchers adopted the theory of collective bargaining as a theoretical framework. The theory of collective bargaining is fundamental to understanding labor relations and the dynamics between employers and employees, particularly in contexts such as higher education institutions like Akwa Ibom State University. Developed by Sidney Webb and Beatrice Webb in 1897, this theory emphasizes the importance of negotiated agreements that reflect the interests of both parties involved (Webb & Webb, 1897). The Webbs articulated that collective bargaining serves as a mechanism for workers to negotiate with employers, ensuring fair treatment and equitable wealth distribution within industrial systems.

The theory is built on several key assumptions. First, it posits that both employers and employees share common interests in maintaining a productive work environment, despite differing immediate goals wages for workers and profitability for employers (Dunlop, 1958). Second, it assumes that the negotiation process is rational and involves dialogue aimed at reaching a compromise that benefits both parties (Baker, 2014). A critical assumption is that there exists a relatively balanced power dynamic between employees, often represented by unions, and employers, which allows for effective negotiations. Furthermore, the theory suggests that conflicts between workers and employers can be resolved through formal negotiations rather than confrontations or strikes, fostering a collaborative approach to labor relations (Hyman, 2001).

Despite its relevance, collective bargaining theory has faced several criticisms. Critics argue that the theory often fails to adequately address the fundamental power imbalances that exist between employers and employees, especially in scenarios where employers possess greater economic resources or political influence (Freeman & Medoff, 1984). Additionally, the theory's focus on unionized workers raises concerns regarding the exclusion of non-unionized employees, who may lack a formal platform for negotiation (Kochan, Katz, & McKersie, 1986). The bargaining process can also be seen as inefficient, leading to prolonged negotiations that may hinder timely decision-making, particularly in academic environments where prompt resolutions are crucial (Gordon, 2016). Finally, critics point out that the compromises reached through collective bargaining may prioritize immediate demands over long-term institutional goals, which can affect the quality of education and research.

Accordingly, in the context of Akwa Ibom State University, the applicability of collective bargaining theory is evident. The university employs both academic and non-academic staff who have varying demands concerning wages, work hours, promotion criteria, and working conditions. Trade unions such as the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and the Non-Academic Staff Union (NASU) play an essential role in negotiating with university management on behalf of employees (Nwankwo, 2019). The collective bargaining process often involves critical discussions on issues like salary structures, promotions, funding for research, and improving overall working conditions. Such negotiations aim to maintain a balance between the university's financial constraints and the welfare of its employees, ensuring that both parties reach mutually beneficial agreements (Obasi & Nwankwo, 2020).

The justification for adopting collective bargaining theory to explain Union and management activities in Akwa Ibom State University is multifaceted. First, it serves as a proactive conflict prevention strategy, allowing the university to avoid costly strikes or other forms of industrial action through regular dialogues with staff unions. This approach is essential for maintaining academic calendars and minimizing disruptions in learning (Afolabi, 2020). Moreover, adopting collective bargaining reflects the university's commitment to addressing the needs and concerns of its employees, fostering a positive work environment and boosting staff morale. The structured nature of collective bargaining ensures that employment terms are negotiated fairly and transparently, preventing arbitrary decisions by university management (Fashoyin, 2011). Lastly, the theory promotes the balancing of stakeholder interests, including those of university management, academic staff, non-academic staff, and students, which is critical for sustaining long-term institutional growth and maintaining educational standards. In conclusion, collective bargaining theory, as articulated by Sidney and Beatrice Webb, remains a vital framework for managing labor relations in institutions like Akwa Ibom State University. Despite facing criticisms, the theory provides a structured process for resolving conflicts between employees and employers, fostering mutual goals. In the university setting, collective bargaining contributes to maintaining a harmonious academic environment that supports both employee welfare and institutional development.

METHODOLOGY

The study on collective bargaining theory at Akwa Ibom State University employed a descriptive research design to thoroughly investigate the application of this theory within the higher education context. This design allowed for an in-depth exploration of current practices, challenges, and implications associated with collective bargaining. Data collection involved two primary methods: documentary analysis and descriptive surveys. Documentary analysis entailed reviewing existing documents relevant to collective bargaining at the university. This included examining Collective Bargaining Agreements (CBAs) signed between university

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management and trade unions such as the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and the Non-Academic Staff Union (NASU). Analyzing these agreements revealed key negotiated issues, terms, and recurring themes.

Additionally, university policy documents related to labor relations and human resource management were scrutinized to understand the institutional framework governing collective bargaining. Minutes from bargaining sessions and reports from relevant agencies were also reviewed to gain insights into discussions and resolutions reached during negotiations. In conjunction with documentary analysis, a descriptive survey was conducted to gather primary data from key stakeholders involved in the collective bargaining process. The target population included academic staff, non-academic staff, and university management, with a stratified sampling technique ensuring representation across departments. A structured questionnaire was developed to collect quantitative data on stakeholders' perceptions of the collective bargaining process, its effectiveness, and its impact on employee welfare and institutional performance. This questionnaire included Likert-scale, multiple-choice, and open-ended questions to allow for comprehensive feedback. The surveys were administered both online and in-person to enhance participation and ensure a higher response rate.

Data analysis involved synthesizing the documentary analysis thematically to identify patterns and insights related to collective bargaining practices, while descriptive statistics were employed to summarize survey responses and provide insights into stakeholder perceptions. Ethical considerations were prioritized throughout the study, with informed consent obtained from participants and assurance of the confidentiality of their responses. Overall, this methodology aimed to contribute valuable insights into the dynamics of labor relations in higher education, particularly within Akwa Ibom State University, and to inform strategies for improving collective bargaining practices in the institution.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study examining the relationship between trade unionism and staff welfare in public institutions in Nigeria, with a focus on Akwa Ibom State University (AKSU), has revealed several critical insights. The findings from this research highlight the pivotal role that trade union activities play in shaping the working conditions and overall staff welfare within public universities like AKSU. The analysis of the data collected through the study indicates that there is a significant relationship between the prevalence of strikes and the state of staff welfare in AKSU. Furthermore, the study findings suggest that the effectiveness of trade union activities in addressing staff welfare issues is influenced by various factors, including the responsiveness of the university management, the availability of financial resources, and the level of collaboration between the unions and the administration. When these elements are aligned, trade unions are better positioned to advocate for and achieve tangible improvements in staff welfare. However, the study also identified that the relationship between trade unions and university management is not always harmonious, with instances of disagreements and disruptive industrial actions. This underscores the need for a more constructive and collaborative approach in addressing staff welfare concerns, where both parties work together to find mutually acceptable solutions.

Overall, the study underscores the importance of understanding the dynamics between staff advocacy mechanisms and welfare outcomes. It shows that while lobbying and strikes can bring attention to staff issues and potentially lead to improvements, they also require careful management to avoid negative consequences. Effective communication and negotiation strategies between staff unions and university management are essential for fostering a conducive working environment and ensuring that staff welfare concerns are adequately addressed. Based on the study findings, the following recommendations are made:

- a. To address the significant correlation between trade union dissatisfaction and management responses, AKSU should strengthen its engagement with trade unions. This includes establishing regular, structured dialogue channels to address grievances and concerns proactively. The university administration should consider implementing feedback mechanisms that allow for timely and effective responses to union demands. By fostering a collaborative environment, both parties can work together to enhance working conditions and staff benefits, thereby reducing dissatisfaction and improving overall staff morale.
- b. Given the significant relationship between lobbying efforts and staff welfare, it is crucial for AKSU to optimize the lobbying process. This involves ensuring that lobbying activities are aligned with the university's strategic goals and addressing key welfare issues. The university should work with staff unions to identify priority areas for lobbying and develop comprehensive plans to address these areas. Additionally, creating a transparent framework for how lobbying efforts are handled and integrated into decision-making processes can help maximize the positive impact of these activities on staff welfare.
- c. The significant impact of strikes on staff welfare highlights the need for effective strike management strategies. AKSU should develop contingency plans to minimize the disruption caused by strikes, ensuring that essential services and academic activities continue smoothly during industrial actions. The university should also invest in improving the underlying issues that lead to strikes, such as salary delays, inadequate funding, and poor working conditions.

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