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## TRADE UNIONISM IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA: A TOOL FOR ACTUALIZING QUALITY EDUCATION FOR SELF RELIANCE.

By

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper titled trade unionism in tertiary institutions in Nigeria: A tool for actualizing quality education for self-reliance is approached by examining the meaning and forms of trade unions in tertiary institutions. The reasons why workers join trade unions, the effect and implication on academic programmes were highlighted. Trade unionism and quality education for self-reliance were discussed while few recommendations were made.*

### INTRODUCTION:

Trade unions or labour unions have become features of formal organizations including educational institutions. Workers in different sectors even traders and market women have different associations which function as trade unions.

Peretomode (2001) said that the first trade union in Nigeria was formed in 1912, and that was the Civil Service Union (CSU) and which later came to be called the Nigerian Civil Service Union (NCSU). The purpose of trade union is to bring together into a strong body that is able to negotiate on equal terms with employers of Labour.

Unions in Nigeria have been branded in most people's mind, as trouble-making organizations. This impression in most part, is unfair and unfortunate as their work goes far deeper than militant function of calling for strikes and confronting management.

In countries all over World, union leaders sit down with management or employers of labour to find out workable solutions to matters of trade dispute. Unions are also responsible for a wide range of welfare packages and should be instrumental in providing extensive educational and training services for their members. This paper therefore examines the meaning, forms and the reasons why workers join trade unions in tertiary Institutions. The effects and Implications on academic programmes were discussed while trade unionism and quality education for self-reliance were also highlighted.

### Meaning of Trade Union

Another word for trade union is also referred to as labour union. This is a registered voluntary association of workers in an organization or Institution or occupation, which represent and facilitate the social and economic interest of the members.

The trade Union decree in Nigeria of 1973 defines a trade union as "any combination of workers or employees whether temporary or permanent, the purpose of which is to regulate the terms and conditions of employment of workers". If a Union is not registered it cannot carry out its activities as stated in Decree 1973.

Peretomode and Peretomode (2001) pointed out that should this provision be violated by the Union, every official of the Union and any member, who is not an official but took active part in the performance of the prohibited act, shall be guilty of an offence against the decree.

### Forms of Trade Unions in Tertiary Institutions.

Trade unions in tertiary institutions in Nigeria started as far back as 1973 when the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) was registered and recognized in a government gazette as the Union for teachers in Nigerian Universities.

Senior Staff Association of Universities, Teaching Hospitals, Research Institutes and Associated Institutions (SSAUTHRIAI) was formed and registered as a trade union in 1978.

*Trade Unionism In Tertiary Institutions In Nigeria: A Tool  
For Actualizing Quality Education For Self Reliance.*

Colleges of Education Academic Staff Union (COEASU) and Academic staff union of polytechnics (ASUP) were formed for teachers at the colleges and polytechnics respectively in 1993.

*Non-Academic Staff Union (NASU) was formed for the junior Staff that are non-teaching in tertiary Institutions in Nigeria. This trade Union came into existence when it was registered in 1976 as an affiliate of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC).*

Iloh (2006) stated that Academic Staff Union of the Universities (ASUU) Colleges of Education Academic Staff Unions (COEASU) and Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics (ASUP) are unions of workers in tertiary institutions doing similar jobs, (teaching, research, service, and dissemination of information after undergoing the same pre-service training. In the same vein members of Senior Staff Association of Universities, Teaching Hospitals, Research Institutes and Associated Institutions (SSAUTHRIAI), Senior Staff Association (SSA) and Non-Academic Staff Union (NASU) in the tertiary Institutions (Universities Teaching Hospitals, Colleges of Education, Polytechnics, Research Institutes, College of Agriculture) etc have the same basic pre-service orientation or training and perform similar duties.

#### **Reasons Why Workers Join Unions**

Researches conducted by several scholars have revealed numerous reasons why workers in tertiary institutions should join unions.

Crane 1974, Brett 1980, Peretomode (2001), Carini (2006) identified the following reasons as:

- i. Poor working conditions
- ii. Need for shorter working hours.
- iii. Inequalities in salaries with people doing identical work.
- iv. Over-time without compensation
- v. Constant pressure and harassment for work for duly completed.
- vi. Poor chances of getting promotion and advancement
- vii. Job security
- viii. Management treatment of workers as if they are not intelligent
- ix. Peer pressure to join unions
- x. Participation in decision making affecting workers at their working environment provided by the union membership.
- xi. Man's natural tendency to belong to a social group and congregate.
- xii. Lack of Communication between workers and management.

#### **Effects of Trade Unions on Academic Programmes**

Different cases have been made for and against in considering whether trade unions affect academic programmes in tertiary Institutions or not.

Critics of unions argue that efforts to improve compensation and working conditions of workers in tertiary Institutions have affected the academic programmes. Brimelow and Spencer (1993); Sykes (1995); Liberman (1997) Moo (1999) and Carini (2006) identified effects of trade unions on academic programmes as:

1. Trade Unions in tertiary Institutions have made it more difficult for management to remove ineffective workers in the system. For example, cleaners and messengers that are supposed to clean toilets, sweep classrooms and open offices early enough for the day's activity do not perform their duties and as such; the academic programme for the day will be affected.
2. Some lecturers are very ineffective in their teaching; some are involved in extorting money from students in order to alter their grades. They are involved in the sale of unapproved (low quality) books, handouts etc which have great effect on quality of the academic programmes. Unions will resist management from firing these categories of workers.
3. Unionism brings conflicted relationship between the workers, management and Government. When there is conflict between Union and Management it may lead to strike action, which will definitely paralyze the academic programmes of the Institution. Lecturers may not attend lectures, typist/Computer operators; cleaners and messengers may not

- perform their legitimate duties thereby paralyzing the academic programmes.
4. Due to the union political clout in tertiary institutions, the unions can block promising education reforms. Any education reform that may threaten the interest and integrity of the Union is always resisted by the Union. For example there is an institution where workers' promotion criteria were slightly changed. The change was to encourage the workers to be more productive but it was highly resisted by union members.
5. Increased formalization as a result of Unionization hampers management's ability to manage their Institutions. When an Institution is not properly managed such as delay in payment of salaries, lack of Instructional materials such as textbooks, chalk, conducive offices, among others can equally affect the academic programme.
6. Workers Unions in tertiary Institutions can raise the cost of education, especially workers salaries, if well established. For instance if there is an increase in workers salaries, the school fees, hostel fees, books, feeding all will increase thereby raising the cost of education in tertiary institutions in Nigeria.
7. Unions also raise the costs of education thereby draining resources away from inputs that raise educational programme.
8. Unions encourage distrustful relationship between workers and management.
9. Workers Union strike can disrupt teaching/learning process, lower morale, and damage community/the Institution's cordial relationship that has existed.

#### **Implications of Trade Unions on Educational programmes**

Experiences and observations have shown that the Nigerian government always have a lukewarm attitude towards resolving issues involving unionism through round-table discussion and dialoguc. The government can only resolve issues when the situation is very critical and has degenerated to strike action, which has a lot of implications on our educational programmes.

1. Unions in tertiary Institutions in Nigeria are always embarking on strike. Thus either the Academic Staff will embark on strike or the Senior Staff Association or the Non-Academic Staff (NASU) representing the Junior Staff. This strike action always have devastating effects on the academic programmes.
2. Unionism in tertiary Institution can instigate students into crises. Students can demonstrate violently when the academic programmes are rudely interrupted due to workers incessant strike actions. Buildings, vehicles and valuable properties are wantonly destroyed.
3. Students can become armed robbers, 419, cultist due to long-stay at home caused by strike action embarked upon by Unions in tertiary Institutions in Nigeria.
4. Due to long-stay at home the academic calendar may be disrupted, which may lead to the extension of the academic year. Those that are supposed to graduate that year may be affected because of the spill over effect.
5. Unionism encourages examination malpractice in tertiary Institutions. For example where workers embark on strike for two months. There will be no teaching and learning. Suddenly the strike is called-off. The Students will be told to prepare for examination next week. What do you think will be the outcome of students performance? Some lecturers may resort to leaking of questions to the Students so that his/her students can pass the course because there was no meaningful teaching and learning.
- 6) Production of half-baked Graduates: Omo-Ojugo (2005) stated that in 2001 the World Bank and the Nigerian Institute for Social and Economic Research (NISER) Ibadan, produced a grim report on the Nigerian graduate which has confirmed the fears of educators, parents, employers of labour and the general public about the degeneration of the country's education. The report revealed that the average graduate who leaves a University or Polytechnic or College of Education with a degree or certificate is not worth the qualification, which he/she is supposed to have. The report concluded by saying that the average Nigerian graduate lacks technical skills, has a poor command of English and are unfit for the labour market because they are half-baked graduates. This is attributed partly to incessant strikes embark upon by unions in tertiary Institutions.

*Trade Unionism In Tertiary Institutions In Nigeria: A Tool  
For Actualizing Quality Education For Self Reliance.*

7. Nigeria Higher Certificate not accorded international recognition. For example a trained medical doctor in Nigeria cannot be allowed to practice in hospitals in London or in America. They will be subjected to undergo rigorous training before allowing them to work in their hospitals. So also Nigerian lawyers cannot go to court in foreign countries without undergoing some training.

***Unionism and Quality Education for Self Reliance***

- i. When trade unions in tertiary institutions are properly managed without iota of confrontation with management, there will be peace and harmony. This can encourage workers into a greater sense of professionalism and dignity, which will spur them to be self-reliant.
- ii. Unions provide workers in tertiary institutions with a collective "voice" to express their ideas, concerns and demand. When workers demands are met, such as regular payment of salaries, payment of arrears and allowances, regular promotion etc. Workers will be happy and can save money or take loan from the institution's cooperative to establish small scale business such as poultry farming, fishery which can make the workers to be self-reliant.
- iii. With Good management of trade unions the institution becomes more formalized.
- iv. Unions make management to sit up and become more effective in administration by providing infrastructural facilities such as good offices for workers, enough classrooms, library, laboratories, medical facilities, good instructional materials which will enable students to acquire some basic utilizable skills that can enable them to be self-reliant.
- v. Trade unions encourage lecturers to engage in more instructional preparation time.
- vi. Unionism promotes quality-learning environment. They discourage policies and practices that involve harassment; humiliation, violence, punishment, cultism, drug abuse and sexual harassment instead of confrontation. When the learning environment is peaceful students will acquire the essential knowledge and skills that will make them to be self-reliant in life.

The positive and negative sides of trade unionism in tertiary institutions have been highlighted. The executives of the three unions should focus their attention on the positive aspect so as to achieve positive results that will take the tertiary institutions in Nigeria to a greater height. This will help the lecturers, workers and students to achieve quality education for self-reliance.

**CONCLUSION:**

This paper has carefully examined the meaning and forms of trade unions, in tertiary institutions and reasons why workers join unions. The effects and implications of trade unions on educational programmes were highlighted. Unionism and quality education for self-reliance were discussed. Union executives should not see management as an enemy. They are partners in progress. Confronting, attacking and petitioning management cannot bring any positive development in an institution rather it brings rancour, acrimony, distrust and atmosphere of fear which cannot favour quality education for self-reliance both on the part of workers and students.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

As the workers in tertiary Institutions are regarded as the building blocks or the engine that moves the Institutions, trade unions should be properly managed. For effective management of the Unions the following recommendations are made: -

1. Management should always invite the three Unions together when basic decisions are to be made. This is because taking decisions that affect the unions at different times may-generate problem.
2. Trade Unions complaint should not be allowed to degenerate into Industrial disharmony. It should be looked into promptly to save loss of valuable time and resources.
3. Management should always see trade Unions as partners in progress. This will help to control or reduce frivolous petitions and unnecessary demands by the Unions. They should not be seen as antagonists.
4. Trade Unions should not take laws into their hands by attacking management unnecessarily.

- and declaring industrial action as if that is the only means of achieving Unions demand. They should always observe the rule of law of "due process".
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5. Trade Unions should endeavour to carry her members along. They should not take arbitrary decisions without due consultation and approval by the congress. When there is peace and harmony between management and Trade Unions in tertiary Institutions the Unions can easily achieve their demands, and the academic programme will not be disrupted.
  6. Government and policy makers should make trade unions more as collaborators rather than adversary.
  7. The government, policy makers and all stakeholders in education should reconsider union proposals for educational improvement. Based on the empirical evidence, that unions have a solid track record supporting policies that boost achievement for most students so that they can achieve self-reliance.

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