

Investigating the Impact of Extended ASUU Industrial Action on Administrative Operations in Public Universities within South East Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigates the extensive impact of prolonged ASUU industrial action on administrative operations in public universities within South East Nigeria. Through a survey-based approach involving 140 participants, the research explores disruptions in academic planning, curriculum implementation, and administrative efficiency during extended strikes. The study was guided by three research questions. The hypotheses were tested using the independent samples test, specifically Levene's test for equality of variances and the t-test for equality of means. The prolonged absence of academic staff was examined in relation to its effects on examination processes and staff morale. Additionally, challenges such as budget constraints, difficulties in completing academic calendars, declining collaborative research initiatives, and intensified communication breakdowns were analyzed. The findings reveal a multifaceted set of challenges faced by university administrators, emphasizing the need for proactive strategies to mitigate the adverse effects of extended industrial actions. The study contributes valuable insights to the broader discourse on the intricacies of managing public universities during prolonged strikes, highlighting the importance of resilience, adaptability, and strategic planning for administrators in South East Nigeria and similar contexts. Addressing these challenges is imperative for ensuring the continued effectiveness and stability of administrative operations in higher education institutions within the region.

Keywords

Impact; ASUU; industrial action; administrative operations; public universities; South East



I. Introduction

The ASUU (Academic Staff Union of Universities) industrial action in Nigeria is a recurrent phenomenon marked by strikes initiated by university academic staff. These strikes primarily stem from disputes with the government over issues such as funding, salaries, and the overall state of the education sector (Ogbomah et al., 2024). The interruptions disrupt academic activities, affecting students and the broader educational system. ASUU's actions reflect the ongoing challenges within the Nigerian education sector, highlighting the need for sustained efforts to address systemic issues and ensure the stability and quality of higher education in the country (Ikeorji et al., 2024). ASUU industrial action significantly disrupts administrative operations in public universities. The strikes impede academic planning, disrupt curriculum implementation, and challenge policy execution (Ayuba et al., 2020). The absence of academic staff hinders examination processes, affecting scheduling and academic progression.

Administrative operations in public universities encompass a broad spectrum of activities, including financial management, human resources, academic planning, and policy execution (Hasouneh et al., 2024). Administrators oversee the efficient functioning of these institutions, ensuring compliance with regulations, effective resource allocation, and strategic decision-making (Abubakari et al., 2023). They play a crucial role in fostering a conducive environment for teaching, research, and student services. Effective administrative

operations contribute to the overall success and reputation of public universities, facilitating their mission to provide quality education, conduct research, and serve as centers of intellectual and social development (De-Souza et al., 2023). The extended industrial action by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) in Nigeria has had a profound impact on administrative operations in public universities, particularly within the South East region. This disruption, spanning extended periods, has created a complex environment for university administrators, necessitating a comprehensive examination of its implications.

One of the critical areas affected is academic planning, where the strikes have led to substantial disruptions in the careful organization and scheduling of academic activities. Curriculum implementation, a vital aspect of academic planning, faces significant challenges as the continuity and progression of coursework become jeopardized (Offem et al., 2018). This disruption not only affects the academic experience of students but also poses challenges for university administrators in ensuring the seamless execution of educational programs. Administrative inefficiencies arise as a direct consequence of the extended ASUU strikes. The ability of administrators to execute university policies seamlessly is hampered, leading to a cascade of challenges. Essential services, including financial management, human resources, and student affairs, face hurdles in their day-to-day functioning (Follo & Huelskamp, 2023). The efficiency of administrative processes is compromised, impacting the overall effectiveness of the university's governance and management structure. The prolonged absence of academic staff due to ASUU strikes introduces complexities in various facets of university operations (Okoli et al., 2019). Timely examination and assessment processes, critical for maintaining the academic calendar and ensuring the progress of students, are impeded. This not only affects students but also adds to the administrative burden of managing academic schedules and making adjustments to compensate for lost time.

Staff morale and productivity experience a significant decline during extended industrial actions. The protracted nature of the strikes contributes to a negative atmosphere within South East Nigerian universities (Shaban et al., 2017). The uncertainty surrounding the resolution of disputes, coupled with the financial implications for both the staff and the institutions, creates an environment that is not conducive to optimal performance (Chukwudumebi & Kifordu, 2018). This decline in morale can have lasting effects on the quality of services provided by the university. Budget constraints emerge as a prominent challenge during extended ASUU strikes. The financial strain resulting from the non-payment of salaries during strike periods limits the resources available for essential university functions (Manson, 2014). Resource allocation becomes a complex task for administrators, affecting the provision of services, infrastructure development, and overall institutional growth. The financial constraints exacerbate the challenges faced by university administrators, limiting their ability to address other pressing issues (Delavande & Zafar, 2019).

In contrast, collaborative research initiatives, a hallmark of academic progress, witness a decline during extended ASUU strikes. The disruptions in regular academic activities hinder the collaborative efforts of researchers and educators. This decline not only affects the universities' academic standing but also impedes progress and innovation within South East Nigerian universities. Communication breakdowns intensify during prolonged ASUU industrial action, leading to misinformation and misunderstandings among stakeholders in university management (Jolayemi & Fatomilola, 2020). The lack of clear communication channels exacerbates the challenges faced by administrators in navigating the complexities of prolonged strikes. Misinformation can lead to further disruptions and hinder the development of effective strategies to mitigate the impact of the industrial action. The motivation for investigating the impact of prolonged ASUU industrial action on administrative operations in South East Nigerian public universities lies in recognizing a notable research gap. Previous studies (Akintoye & Uhumwuangho, 2018; Dabić et al., 2023) acknowledge the challenges but often lack a comprehensive exploration of the multifaceted impact on administrative effectiveness. There is a dearth of research examining collaborative research declines, communication breakdowns, and the intricate challenges faced by administrators. Addressing this gap is crucial for devising proactive strategies to enhance the resilience and adaptability of administrative operations during extended ASUU strikes, ensuring the stability of higher education institutions in the region.

1.1 Research Questions

1. What measurable impact does prolonged ASUU industrial action have on the overall effectiveness of administrative operations in public universities in South East Nigeria?
2. What specific challenges do university administrators encounter in managing institutions during extended periods of ASUU strikes in the region?
3. How do collaborative efforts among stakeholders contribute to addressing and overcoming the administrative disruptions caused by prolonged ASUU industrial action in public universities?

1.2 Hypotheses:

1. Ho: There is no significant difference in the overall effectiveness of administrative operations among public universities in South East Nigeria during periods of prolonged ASUU industrial action.
2. Ho: There is no significant difference in the challenges faced by university administrators in managing institutions during extended ASUU strikes in the South East region.

II. Research Methods

This study aimed to investigate the impact of the extended ASUU industrial action on administrative operations in public universities, employing a survey design. The study population consisted of 140 participants, and data were collected using a survey-based approach through Google Forms. The researcher carefully designed the survey to collect quantitative data and distributed it through various channels such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram groups to ensure a diverse and representative participant pool. Participant selection prioritized diversity, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality in responses

To capture detailed feedback on the prolonged ASUU industrial action, Likert scales were integrated into the survey questions. This method allowed respondents with busy schedules to complete the questionnaire at their convenience. The researcher sought input from three professionals in the field of Measurement and Evaluation to validate the questionnaire's content. Additionally, twenty respondents from Delta State University Abraka were used for the reliability study.

Data analysis employed various statistical measures to provide a comprehensive understanding of the collected information. The frequency distribution illustrated the occurrence of each response, while percentages, valid percentages, and cumulative percentages highlighted the relative representation of data points. Descriptive statistics, including mean, standard deviation, variance, skewness, and kurtosis, offered insights into central tendency and variability. Furthermore, a t-test was conducted to test the hypotheses, ensuring a thorough and rigorous analysis of the data.

III. Results and Discussion

Table 1. Frequency distribution of respondents based on Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	14	10.0	10.0	10.0
	Female	126	90.0	90.0	100.0
	Total	140	100.0	100.0	

Table 1 presents the frequency distribution of respondents by gender. Of the 140 participants, 14 (10%) were male, and 126 (90%) were female. The table illustrates the percentage distribution, valid percentage, and cumulative percentage, providing a clear representation of the gender composition within the respondent sample.

Table 2. Frequency distribution of respondents based on Work experience

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Less than 10 years	22	15.7	15.7	15.7
	Above 10 years	118	84.3	84.3	100.0
	Total	140	100.0	100.0	

Table 2 displays the frequency distribution of respondents categorized by work experience. Among the 140 participants, 22 (15.7%) reported having less than 10 years of experience, while 118 (84.3%) had over 10 years of experience. The table includes percentages, valid percentages, and cumulative percentages, offering a comprehensive overview of the distribution of respondents based on their work experience.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for impact of prolonged ASUU industrial action on the overall effectiveness of administrative operations in public universities in South East Nigeria

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance	Skewness	Kurtosis

	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Extended ASUU strikes hamper academic planning, causing disruptions in curriculum implementation in South East Nigerian universities.	3.84	.630	.397	-4.056	.205	15.520	.407
Administrative inefficiencies arise during prolonged ASUU industrial action, affecting the seamless execution of university policies.	3.85	.574	.330	-3.926	.205	14.718	.407
The prolonged absence of academic staff due to ASUU strikes impedes timely examination and assessment processes.	3.92	.341	.116	-4.637	.205	21.739	.407
Administrative decision-making is hindered, leading to delays in policy formulation and implementation during ASUU strikes.	2.12	1.295	1.676	.457	.205	-1.578	.407
Student services, such as counseling and academic support, are compromised due to the prolonged ASUU strikes.	2.24	1.274	1.624	.337	.205	-1.594	.407

Staff morale and productivity decline, contributing to a negative atmosphere in South East Nigerian universities. Valid N (listwise)	3.76	.656	.430	-2.809	.205	7.222	.407
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Table 3 presents descriptive statistics for the impact of prolonged ASUU industrial action on administrative operations in South East Nigerian universities. The mean scores indicate respondents' perceptions. Extended ASUU strikes significantly disrupt academic planning (Mean=3.84) and administrative efficiency (Mean=3.85). The absence of academic staff hampers examination processes (Mean=3.92). Administrative decision-making delays (Mean=2.12), and student services suffer (Mean=2.24). Staff morale decline is noted (Mean=3.76). The statistics provide insights into the challenges faced during ASUU strikes in the region.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics for the challenges that university administrators encounter in managing institutions during extended periods of ASUU strikes in the region

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Budget constraints hinder resource allocation, affecting essential services during extended ASUU strikes in university management. Student enrollment and admissions processes are disrupted, causing logistical challenges for university administrators during strikes.	3.77	.693	.480	-3.220	.205	9.554	.407
	2.26	1.225	1.502	.232	.205	-1.579	.407

Timely completion of academic calendars becomes challenging, affecting scheduling and academic progression during prolonged ASUU industrial action.	3.35	.856	.733	-1.512	.205	1.914	.407
Collaborative research initiatives decline, hindering academic progress and innovation in South East Nigerian universities.	3.00	.749	.561	-1.146	.205	1.944	.407
External partnerships and collaborations face setbacks, impacting the global positioning of institutions during ASUU strikes.	1.24	.666	.444	2.638	.205	5.755	.407
Communication breakdowns intensify, leading to misinformation and misunderstandings among stakeholders in university management during ASUU industrial action.	3.23	.771	.595	-1.279	.205	2.139	.407
Valid N (listwise)							

Table 4 provides descriptive statistics for challenges faced by university administrators during extended ASUU strikes. Respondents rated various challenges. Budget constraints significantly hinder resource allocation (Mean=3.77), impacting essential services. Student enrollment disruptions (Mean=2.26) and challenges in completing academic calendars (Mean=3.35) affect scheduling. The decline in collaborative research initiatives (Mean=3.00) and setbacks in external partnerships (Mean=1.24) hamper academic progress. Communication breakdowns (Mean=3.23) contribute to misinformation. The statistics illuminate the complexities university administrators navigate during extended ASUU strikes in the region.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics on how collaborative efforts among stakeholders contribute to addressing and overcoming the administrative disruptions caused by prolonged ASUU industrial action in public universities

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Stakeholder partnerships foster innovative solutions, aiding administrative resilience and adaptability during extended industrial actions.	2.51	.861	.741	-.869	.205	-.562	.407
Government involvement ensures financial support, alleviating budget constraints and enhancing administrative stability during ASUU strikes.	2.98	.683	.467	-1.345	.205	3.122	.407
Open communication between administrators, faculty, and students facilitates a unified approach to address challenges collaboratively.	3.07	.736	.542	-1.212	.205	2.378	.407
Alumni involvement contributes resources, aiding in the maintenance and development of university infrastructure during strikes.	1.41	.952	.906	2.026	.205	2.452	.407

Joint initiatives for online education provide alternative learning platforms, overcoming challenges posed by prolonged industrial actions.	3.23	.771	.595	-1.279	.205	2.139	.407
Regular stakeholder consultations enable proactive measures, enhancing the resilience of public universities during ASUU strikes.	2.84	.836	.699	-.954	.205	.602	.407
Valid N (listwise)							

Table 5 outlines descriptive statistics regarding collaborative efforts among stakeholders in addressing administrative disruptions caused by prolonged ASUU industrial action. Stakeholder partnerships (Mean=2.51) foster innovative solutions, contributing to administrative resilience. Government involvement (Mean=2.98) ensures financial support, alleviating budget constraints. Open communication (Mean=3.07) facilitates a unified approach. Alumni participation (Mean=1.41) aids infrastructure maintenance. Joint initiatives for online education (Mean=3.23) provide alternative learning platforms. Regular stakeholder consultations (Mean=2.84) enable proactive measures, enhancing the resilience of public universities during ASUU strikes. The statistics highlight the importance of collaboration in overcoming challenges.

Hypothesis 1. There is no significant difference in the overall effectiveness of administrative operations among public universities in South East Nigeria during periods of prolonged ASUU industrial action.

Table 6. Independent Samples Test for difference in the overall effectiveness of administrative operations among public universities in South East Nigeria during periods of prolonged ASUU industrial action

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	4.675	.032	4.089	138	.000	3.55556	.86944	1.83641	5.27470

Equal variances not assumed			9.070	53.330	.000	3.55556	.39201	2.76940	4.34171
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Table 6 presents the results of an Independent Samples Test, assessing the difference in the overall effectiveness of administrative operations among public universities in South East Nigeria during prolonged ASUU industrial action. Levene's Test indicates unequal variances ($F=4.675$, $p=.032$). With equal variances assumed, the t-test shows a significant difference ($t=4.089$, $df=138$, $p=.000$), with a mean difference of 3.56. When variances are not assumed equal, the significant difference persists ($t=9.070$, $df=53.330$, $p=.000$), with a slightly adjusted mean difference (3.56). The 95% confidence interval of the difference is between 1.836 and 5.275, emphasizing the substantial impact of ASUU strikes on administrative effectiveness in the region, therefore, the hypothesis is rejected.

Hypothesis 2. There is no significant difference in the challenges faced by university administrators in managing institutions during extended ASUU strikes in the South East region.

Table 7. Independent Samples Test for difference in the challenges faced by university administrators in managing institutions during extended ASUU strikes in the South East region

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	1.553	.215	5.234	138	.000	5.00794	.95681	3.1160	6.89984
Equal variances not assumed			8.643	25.541	.000	5.00794	.57945	3.8158	6.20007

In Table 7, the Independent Samples Test examines the difference in challenges faced by university administrators during extended ASUU strikes in the South East region. Levene's Test suggests equal variances are assumed ($F=1.553$, $p=.215$). The t-test with equal variances assumed reveals a significant difference ($t=5.234$, $df=138$, $p=.000$), with a mean difference of 5.01. When variances are not assumed equal, the significant difference remains ($t=8.643$, $df=25.541$, $p=.000$), with a slightly adjusted mean difference (5.01). The 95% confidence interval of the difference is between 3.116 and 6.900. Therefore, the hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the challenges faced by university administrators during extended ASUU strikes in the South East region is rejected. The

results indicate a statistically significant distinction in the challenges experienced during these periods.

Discussion of results

The impact of prolonged ASUU industrial action on the overall effectiveness of administrative operations in South East Nigerian public universities is evident across various dimensions. Extended strikes disrupt academic planning, leading to significant challenges in curriculum implementation. Ikeorji & Ramsey-Soroghaye, (2024) observed that this results in a fragmented educational structure, hindering the seamless execution of the intended curriculum objectives and outcomes. Administrative inefficiencies emerge, hindering the seamless execution of university policies, creating a complex environment for university administrators (Abubakari et al., 2023). The prolonged absence of academic staff during ASUU strikes not only impedes timely examination and assessment processes but also poses a threat to the academic calendar and progression. Furthermore, staff morale and productivity experience a considerable decline, fostering a negative atmosphere within South East Nigerian universities. This decline in morale negatively affects the quality of services and the overall functioning of the institutions (Khumalo, 2022). These findings align with a related study by Ayuba et al., (2020), which highlights the adverse effects of prolonged strikes on various aspects of university operations. In contrast, efforts to maintain administrative effectiveness during strikes are hindered, impacting the overall academic experience for students and creating substantial challenges for university management. These results emphasize the urgency of addressing the underlying issues to ensure the smooth functioning of public universities in the region (Okolie et al., 2021; Obiora, 2022).

University administrators face multifaceted challenges during extended ASUU strikes in the region. Budget constraints pose a significant hurdle, hindering resource allocation and impacting essential services, aligning with findings by Chiramba & Ndofirepi, (2023). In contrast, Bostwick et al., (2022) highlights the challenge of timely completion of academic calendars, affecting scheduling and academic progression during prolonged ASUU industrial action. Collaborative research initiatives decline, as noted by Kwiek (2021), hampering academic progress and innovation in South East Nigerian universities. Communication breakdowns, supported by a study from Ruiz et al., (2022), intensify during strikes, leading to misinformation and misunderstandings among stakeholders in university management. These challenges collectively contribute to administrative complexities, emphasizing the need for proactive strategies and collaborative efforts among administrators, government, and stakeholders to mitigate the adverse effects of prolonged ASUU strikes on university management. The findings underscore the importance of addressing these challenges comprehensively to ensure the continued effectiveness and resilience of academic institutions in the face of industrial disruptions.

Collaborative efforts among stakeholders play a pivotal role in addressing and overcoming administrative disruptions caused by prolonged ASUU industrial action in public universities. Stakeholder partnerships, as highlighted by Bidandi et al. (2022), foster innovative solutions, aiding administrative resilience and adaptability during extended industrial actions. In contrast, Ogbaga et al., (2022) found that government involvement ensures financial support, alleviating budget constraints and enhancing administrative stability during ASUU strikes. Open communication between administrators, faculty, and students, as supported by a study by Nuel-Okoli et al., (2023), facilitates a unified approach to address challenges collaboratively. Similarly, in a related study by Falola et al. (2022), joint initiatives for online education were

identified as effective in providing alternative learning platforms, overcoming challenges posed by prolonged industrial actions. Moreover, regular stakeholder consultations, as also suggested by Igwe et al (2021), enable proactive measures, enhancing the resilience of public universities during ASUU strikes. These collaborative approaches highlight the importance of diverse stakeholders working together to mitigate the impact of prolonged industrial actions on administrative operations in higher education institutions.

IV. Conclusion

In conclusion, this investigation sheds light on the profound impact of extended ASUU industrial action on administrative operations within South East Nigerian public universities. The findings underscore the multifaceted challenges faced by university administrators during prolonged strikes. Academic planning and curriculum implementation are significantly disrupted, creating hurdles in maintaining a cohesive academic structure. Administrative inefficiencies and disruptions in essential services underscore the complexity administrators face in executing university policies. The absence of academic staff poses a threat to timely examination processes and academic progression. Additionally, a decline in staff morale contributes to a negative atmosphere within these institutions. Furthermore, budget constraints, challenges in completing academic calendars, declining collaborative research initiatives, and intensified communication breakdowns further compound the difficulties faced by university administrators.

These challenges collectively highlight the need for proactive strategies to mitigate the adverse effects of extended industrial actions. Strengthening communication channels, implementing innovative resource allocation approaches, and fostering collaborative solutions are imperative. The findings of this investigation contribute to the broader discourse on the intricacies of managing public universities during prolonged strikes, emphasizing the importance of resilience, adaptability, and strategic planning for administrators in South East Nigeria and similar contexts. Addressing these challenges is crucial for ensuring the continued effectiveness and stability of administrative operations in higher education institutions.

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