

THE EVOLUTION OF UNIVERSITY EDUCATION, UNIVERSITY AUTONOMY AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE ACADEMIC STAFF UNION OF UNIVERSITIES (ASUU) IN NIGERIA: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Universities are regarded as key institutions in the processes of social change and development. The most explicit role universities play are the production of highly skilled labour and research output to meet perceived economic needs. However, Nigerian universities are yet to meet the basic requirements of the university which is the production of highly skilled labour to enable the country achieve self-reliance in technology and food security. The paper takes a historical overview of the development of the university education in Nigeria and observes that the university on its own cannot achieve excellence without academic freedom and university autonomy being enshrined in the system. The partial academic autonomy in the universities led to the emergence of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) as a pressure group to safeguard the highest standard of intellectual performance of scholars. The study, thus, examines the concept of university autonomy and the role of ASUU in the sustenance of university education in Nigeria. Basically, the study is qualitative, utilizing mostly secondary data in its analysis. The findings of the study reveal that academic autonomy has not fared better since the emergence of universities in Nigeria, thereby constraining the contributions of the universities to national development. If excellence must be achieved and sustained in our universities, the study concludes, by recommending that the federal and the state governments should increase the budgetary allocation to universities and listen to ASUU any time the union draws their attention to the anomalies in the system.

Keywords: University education, federal government, university autonomy, emergence, ASUU.

1.0 Introduction

The history of higher education in Nigeria is largely a product of British colonial framework. The introduction process was initiated by E.R.J. Hussey. In 1930, Hussey according to Fafunwa and Aisiku (1982) introduced in the Legislative Council a motion for the establishment of a system of education which he called 'vocational training' for the production of qualified assistants in medicine and engineering and teachers for the higher middle schools. The first institution of the higher learning called the Higher College was sited at Yaba, Lagos, and admitted its first students in 1932. The college was extremely restrictive in both its entrance and graduating requirements. Only few students, mainly from Government College at Ibadan and Umuahia, gained admission. It was

partly because of this unsatisfactory progress of higher education in Nigeria and West Africa that made the Colonial Office in 1943 to appoint a Commission on Higher Education in West Africa under the leadership of the Rt. Hon. Walter Eliot with the following terms of reference:

- a. To report on the organization and facilities of the existing centres of higher education in British West Africa, and
- b. To make recommendations regarding future university development in the area.

The commission submitted two reports to the Secretary of State for Colonies in 1944, which recommended as follows:

- i. There should be a university college in Nigeria, and other British West African colonies.
 - ii. The university college in Nigeria should include Arts and Science courses and professional schools of medicine, agriculture, forestry and veterinary science and teacher training.
 - iii. The commission also recommended that the university college for Nigeria should be sited at Ibadan (Fafunwa and Aisiku, 1982).
- c. A university should be established in the North using the old site of the Nigeria College in Zaria as its base
 - d. A university should be established in Lagos with day and evening degree courses in business, commerce and economics.
 - e. University College, Ibadan, should move away from conservative position, widen its curriculum and develop into full university.
 - f. All universities in Nigeria should be national in outlook.

In January 1948, the University College for Nigeria came into being when the students of Yaba Higher College were transferred to become the foundation students of the University College, Ibadan. The group that left Yaba Higher College according to Fafunwa and Aisiku (1982) was made up of 104 students and 13 teachers. Again, in 1959, the Federal Minister of Education appointed a commission to conduct an investigation into Nigeria's needs in the field of post-secondary school certificate and higher education for the next 20 years. The commission was headed by Sir Eric Ashby, a Briton. Three Nigerians served on the commission. Professor K.O. Dike, formerly Vice Chancellor of the University of Ibadan, Sir Shettima Kashim, then the Waziri of Bornu, and Dr. S .D .Onabamiro, the Minister of Education, Western Nigeria. The Commission's Report titled *Investment in Education* was aimed at upgrading Nigeria's indigenous employees through further education and subsequently to design a system of post-secondary education such as will supply the country's manpower needs up to 1980 (Ejiogu, 1988). The commission according to Ejiogu recommended as follows:

- a. The integration of the Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology into the university system to permit the concentration of university resources around existing centres of academic activities in the country.
- b. The federal government should give support to the development of the new University of Nigeria, planned in 1955 and

It should, however, be noted that the whole effort for the establishment of higher education in Nigeria and West Africa did not totally emanate from the goodwill of the British Colonial Government. In fact, the activities of the African nationalists also contributed to the emergence of higher education in Nigeria and other West African States. The petition written by the National Congress of British West Africa (NCBWA) in 1920 after their congress in Accra, Ghana, also helped in the facilitation of higher education in West Africa and Nigeria. In a petition the NCBWA sent to Lord Milner, the British Secretary of State for colonies, they made series of demands of which one was "the establishment of a West African University and general improvement of educational and health facilities" (Nwankwo, 1990). The establishment of University College, Ibadan, was partly as a result of the activities of these great African nationalists.

Having briefly traced the historical background to higher education in Nigeria, the study aims at critically assessing the evolution of university education in Nigeria, examines the concepts of academic freedom and university autonomy. The study will also investigate the factors that led to the emergence of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), and its role in the sustenance of university education in Nigeria. To achieve this aim, the paper is structured into sections. With this introductory overview, it proceeds to discussing the universal role of universities, with human capital theory as its theoretical framework; the third section discusses the history and development of university education in Nigeria and the factors that

led to proliferation of universities in Nigeria. Section four examines the concepts of university autonomy and academic freedom; section five discusses the emergence of ASUU and its fight for university academic freedom and autonomy, and the benefits of university autonomy; while section six concludes with policy recommendations. We shall now turn our attention to the meaning of university.

The University: Conceptual Explanation

Universities are seen as crucial national assets in addressing many policy priorities, and as sources of new knowledge and innovative thinking; providers of skilled personnel and credible credentials; contributors to innovation; attractors of international talent and business investment; agents of social justice and mobility; contributors to social and cultural vitality; and determinants of health and well-being (Geoffrey, 2009). University according to Martin (2013) is a place for preparation for complexities of a world that needs rigorous analyses of its problems and synthetic approaches to solving them. Thus, without the skills from the university, the society may likely fail to exploit new intellectual capital and is unable to make decisive decisions. To be sure, universities serve to make students think. They do so according to Geoffrey (2009) by feeding and training their instincts to understand and seek meaning. They are taught to question interpretations that are given to them, to reduce chaos of information to the order of an analytical argument and seek out what is relevant to the resolution of a problem.

It was these beautiful characteristics of the universities that made Nzimiro (1975) to write with strong approval that universities are:

Entities consisting of persons passionately devoted to the search for the truth, wisdom and knowledge. Socrates brought home to mankind that the search for truth and its defence which the universities stand to protect cannot be compromised on the altar of material worldliness. He drank the hemlock poison offered him and died instead of recanting what he believed

as the truth. To the rulers of his days, he was a heretic. To the youth he taught and humanity till date, he towered above those that destroyed him.

Commenting on the importance of university education in the development of Africa, Kofi Annan according to Unya and Onya (2017) states that he believes that the university must become a primary tool for Africa's development in the new century. Universities can help develop African expertise; they can enhance the analysis of African problems; strengthen domestic institutions; serve as a model environment for the practice of governance, conflict resolution and respect for human right, and enable African academics to play an active part in the global community of scholars. The university therefore is a place according to Okorosaye-Orubite, Paulley and Abraham (2012) where concepts hallowed by age and traditions are subjected to severe scrutiny and knowledge grows through dissent, not through compromise. In order to enable the university carry out the above functions set out for it, it is required that the university should enjoy autonomy and academic freedom.

According to the National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004), the purpose of the university education is:

- i. Contribute to national development through high level-level relevant manpower training;
- ii. Develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and society;
- iii. Acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society;
- iv. Promote and encourage scholarship and common services;
- v. Forge and cement national unity, and
- vi. Promote national and international understanding and interactions.

To be sure, the organization of universities remains a key factor in the realization of the

objectives of the university system. There are fundamental principles underlying the corporate existence of the universities. It is widely believed by the old and modern scholars that for universities to remain what they should be, those fundamental principles must be upheld and not politicized. One of the principles is that as institutions poised with the responsibility of generating, transmitting, appraising knowledge and transmitting culture and ethics through teaching and research, they should not operate under the influence of political authorities and economic powers so that objectivity can be guaranteed (Magna Charta Universitatum 2001). It is also maintained that freedom in research and training is a core principle that can allow for the achievement of the objectives of the university education.

University: The Theoretical Framework

The underlying principle on which this study is based is that the university develops the intellectual capacity of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environments, thus, making 'human capital theory' very relevant to the study. Human capital theory has had a profound impact on the range of disciplines from economics to education, history and sociology. Goldin (2010) asserts that human capital is a collection of traits – all the knowledge, talents, skills, abilities, experiences, training, judgment and wisdom possessed individually and collectively by individuals in a population. All these traits mentioned by Goldin are traits that are mostly acquired through university education. Therefore, a country or region that has high human capital will represent a form of wealth which can be directed to accomplish the goals of the nation or the region. According to Schultz (1971), human capital theory provides a basic justification for large public expenditure on education both in the developing and developed nations.

Many scholars have argued that there is an aspect of the factors of productions (that is, land, labour, capital and entrepreneurship) which cannot be traced exclusively to the outputs of the production process. This factor, which is known as the 'human capital' differs from the 'physical capital'. While physical capital denotes the assets, properties and

materials including money which are used for the production process, the human capital denotes the innate abilities, knowledge or skills of workers in an organization. According to this theory, the human capital can be acquired in educational institutions which can be at primary, secondary or tertiary level. The level of education attained by an individual will dictate the ability of the individual. When the level of education is high, the quality of human capital will be high but low, the level of education will be low too. The theory also believes that the production of human capital will yield considerable return in future, in terms of greater life time income. The higher the quality of individual in terms of the level of education attained, the higher will be the level of income. The theory further believes that better educated individual with more skills will get better job and thus be more productive and will contribute more to the economic growth of the nation (Ige, 2013).

The History and Development of University Education in Nigeria

The history of university education in Nigeria started with the Elliot Commission of 1943, which led to the establishment of University College, Ibadan (UCI) in 1948. UCI was an affiliate of the University of London (Ike, 1976). In April 1959, the Federal Government commissioned an inquiry (the Ashby Commission) to advise it on the higher education needs of the country for its first two decades. Before the submission of the report, the Eastern region government established its own university at Nsukka (University of Nigeria, Nsukka in 1960). The implementation of the Ashby Report led to the establishment of University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife) in 1962 by the Western region, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria in 1962 by the Northern region and University of Lagos (1962) by the Federal Government.

Babalola et al (2007) posited according to Ajayi and Ekundayo (2008) that the University College, Ibadan became full-fledged university in 1962. This meant that UCI, Ibadan and University of Lagos became the first two federal universities in Nigeria – the other three remained regional until the federal government took them. In 1970, the

Mid-Western region which was carved out of Western region established the Mid-West Institute of Technology (MIT). The Institute converted to a university status – the University of Benin. The six universities established during this period 1960 – 1970 are still referred to as first generation universities.

The Third National Development Plan (1975–1980) made provision for the establishment of seven more universities to be located in States where there were none at that time. This gave birth according to Ogunu (1990) to the ‘Seven Sisters’ or Second Generation Universities in 1975. The universities established were as follows:

1. The University of Calabar, which began as Calabar Campus of the University of Nigeria in 1973
2. The University of Jos, founded as a Campus of University of Ibadan in 1971.
3. The University of Maiduguri, 1975.
4. The University of Sokoto, 1975
5. The University of Ilorin, which was former Campus of the University of Ibadan but became a full university in 1977 after becoming a University College in 1975.
6. University of Port Harcourt which took off initially as a University College in 1975 and affiliated to the University of Lagos. It became a full-fledged university in 1977.
7. Bayero University, Kano, which started as Northern Government owned Abdullahi Bayero College in 1961, became Bayero University College of Ahmadu Bello University in 1962 and a full university in 1975.

The 1979 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria placed university education on the Concurrent Legislative list. That meant that, apart from the Federal Government, State Governments who wished could establish their own universities as was the practice before 1975 when university education was put on the Exclusive Legislative list by the then Military Government. Between 1979 and 1983, the following eight State universities were established:

1. Bendel State University, (now Ambrose Ali University, Ekpoma, 1980
2. Anambra State University of Science and Technology (now Enugu State University of Science and Technology 1980
3. Imo State University (now Abia State University, Uturu) 1981
4. Rivers State University of Science and Technology 1981
5. Ondo State University, Ado-Ekiti (now University of Ekiti) 1982
6. Ogun State University (now Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye) 1982
7. Lagos State University 1983 and
8. Cross River State University, Uyo, 1984.

In 1988, the Federal Government announced the establishment of the University of Abuja. Other federal universities established since then are:

- i. Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi 1988
- ii. Federal University of Technology, Owerri 1980
- iii. Federal University of Technology, Akure 1981
- iv. Federal University of Technology, Minna 1982
- v. Federal University of Technology, Yola (now Modibbo Adama) 1988
- vi. Federal University of Agriculture, Makurdi 1988
- vii. Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta 1988
- viii. Federal University of Agriculture, Umudike (now Michael Okpara) 1992.

The Era of Proliferation of Universities in Nigeria

The proliferation of universities and other institutions of higher learning assumed a gradual growth in the immediate years after the civil war (i.e. early 1970s). This was as far as the Ashby report was used as the basis for expansion and development of higher education. Abdulkadir (1993) delivering a paper at the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies, Kuru, Jos, gave a clue as to the factors that led to the proliferation of

universities in Nigeria. According to him, the establishment of tertiary institutions was placed on the con-current list in the 1979 constitution. This led to the establishment of 24 private universities – 22 in the south and 2 in the north. The private universities were later abolished through Decree No. 19 of the 1986. Abdulkadir went ahead to say that some states in the geographical areas that are generally considered as educationally advantaged also decided to establish their own universities in 1979. Ten (10) of these universities were located in the south while two (2) were located in the north.

In 1991, state governments nearly lost their universities as they did in 1977 when the Obasanjo government took over all the universities in the country if not the general public outcry. Military President, Ibrahim Babangida in 1991 announced that the federal government would soon promulgate a decree that would enable it take over state universities throughout the federation. According to the President, “joint ownership of institutions and economic ventures by states weaken both the identity and individuality of states”. If not for the general criticisms of the policy, states would have lost their universities for the second time. For instance, the *NigerianTribune*(1991) in its editorial said: “that the Babangida government is only going to recreate the scenario of the Obasanjo administration when it took over all universities in the country, what followed was a spate of establishment of state universities. Some states cannot trust that operators and manipulators of the education system at the federal level will be fair to them given the obsession for quota system and education advantages. Education is more important to some than others and important lessons have been learnt since 1979”.

In 1999, the government of Olusegun Obasanjo (his second coming) issues licenses to private and corporate bodies to establish universities to complement governmental efforts in providing university education to the masses. There were a lot of reasons and factors that made the federal government to deregulate the education sector. This study identified *population explosion* as a major factor. For instance, in 1960, Nigeria had a

population of 45.148.000 (approximately 45.2 million people) with only two universities (Ibadan and Nsukka) with a total of 1,399 students. In 1961, the number rose to 2406. In 1962/63 academic session, the total university enrolment stood at 3,646. This increased rapidly to 8,888 in 1966/67 session but suffered a reduction during the Nigerian civil war between 1967 and 1970. The set-back was temporary as enrolment doubled every four or five years during the period 1970 and 1985 (Ogunu, 1990). The population of Nigeria rose to 140 million according to 2006 population census and currently being estimated to be 190 million. With this population explosion, the government alone would not have been able to provide the facilities that will provide university education to the citizenry.

Apart from the issue of population, allowing the private universities in Nigeria to operate will conform to the international best practices. For instance, in advanced countries of the world, both private and public sectors of the economy are involved in the provision and management of university education. Osokoya (2007) posits that in Japan, 75% to 80% of the universities are privately owned. Thus, the emergence of private universities has offered Nigerians the opportunity to seek admission alternatives.

In terms of rating universities in Nigeria, the 6 universities established from 1960 – 1970 are referred to as the first generation universities. The 7 universities established during the Third National Development Plan (1975-1980) are referred to as second generation universities. All the universities established between 1980s and early 1990s are collectively referred to as third generation universities. The fourth generation universities are those established between 1999 when civil rule returned in Nigeria till the present date. They include the recent Federal Universities; State Universities, Open University and Private Universities. Nigeria now has 46 federal, 40 states, and 61 private universities (recognized now).

The Concepts of Academic Freedom and University Autonomy

The philosophy of intellectual freedom according to Utile (2008) was granted scholars based on the fact that knowledge improves when humans are allowed to engage in research activities which in turn add to the body of knowledge, which in turn guarantees a free interplay within the system. Okafor (1971) in trying to establish a relationship between the two concepts states that when academic freedom exists, autonomy automatically follows. But autonomy cannot exist without academic freedom in the modern sense since the former allows for freedom to decide who, what, and how to teach or what research to undertake. According to Akpan and Amadi (2017) academic freedom is seen as the personal privilege of an academic staff of a university, while university autonomy is an institutional privilege. Implicitly, while lecturers enjoy academic freedom, universities leverage on institutional autonomy. Academic freedom according to Berdah (2006) implies that teachers are empowered to become independent thinkers, inventors, researchers, teachers and knowledge creators within the confines of academic practice in the institutions, void of fear of intimidation by the administration or government forces.

Berdah goes ahead to assert that it is only by this principle that novel ideas and unpopular views can be expressed and opinionated for possible advancement of the society. Thus, university as an independent and autonomous centre of teaching, learning and research, can only achieve its statutory role of teaching and research if it operates independently. It therefore means that they will not be subjugated by political and economic hegemonies. Thus, academic freedom according to Lima Declaration on Academic Freedom and Autonomy of Institutions of Higher Education (1998) is the freedom of members of the academic community, individually or collectively, in the pursuit, development and transmission of knowledge, through research, study, discussion, documentation, production, creation, teaching, lecturing and writing. It further defines 'academic community' as covering all persons teaching, studying, researching and working in an institution of higher education.

To be sure, university autonomy implies according to Uthman Dan Fodio University Bulletin (1981) (a) the freedom of universities to select their students and staff by criteria chosen by the universities themselves; (b) autonomy to shape their curriculum and syllabus, (c) the freedom to decide how to allocate among their various activities, such funds as are made available to them. University autonomy according to the Academic Freedom Committee of the University of Cape Town (1974) is the degree of self-governance necessary for effective decision-making by institution of higher education in relation to their academic work, standard, management and related activities. This assertion is in line with the views of the Ashby Commission Report on Higher Education in Nigeria (FME, 1960) which recommended that:

A university has to be insulated from the hot and cold winds of politics. Responsibility for its management must be vested in an autonomous council. The council must include representatives of the public, but these representatives must attend as individuals and not as agents for some sectional interest or party line.

In effect, therefore, academic freedom and university autonomy according to the Academic Staff Union of Universities, ASUU (1981) is necessary to safeguard the highest standard of intellectual, social, moral and political performance of scholars. ASUU according to Okorosaye-Orubite, Paulley, and Abraham (2012) reasons that the universities will suffer from the following dangers in their inherent lack or deficiency of autonomy and academic freedom:

- i. Inability of universities to pursue their sacred functions
- ii. Scholars being forced to owe loyalty to the party in power with the consequence of political consideration rather than concern for truth being the decisive factor in determining intellectual issues
- iii. Loss of job security
- iv. University councils, becoming rubber stamps of government; and

v. Inevitable fall of standards.

The inability of the Nigerian universities to achieve a respectable academic freedom and autonomy due to the frequent intervention of the government either directly by refusing to fund the universities appropriately, or indirectly, through its agencies such as the National Universities Commission (NUC), Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) and Tertiary Education Fund (TETFU) who unnecessarily regulate the activities of the universities, might have led to the emergence of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) which has as its major aims: the promotion and sustainable management of university education by providing high quality services in education, teaching, research facilities and university autonomy. Before we discuss the benefits of academic freedom and university autonomy, we shall briefly discuss the historical formation of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU).

The Emergence of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU)

The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) according to Egbokhare (2001) came into existence in 1958. It is an offspring of the Nigerian Association of University Teachers (NAUT). By that time, the nation had only one university, the University College, Ibadan. So, the activities of the union were only limited to the welfare of its members and the government was always willing to comply with its demand. Between 1948 and 1973, confrontation between ASUU and the government was hardly known. This was not because there were no grounds for such confrontations but because the concern of universities in the 1960s and 1970s conformed largely to the conventional picture of academics as an elitist, conservative, and vacillating segment of the middle class, preoccupied with conditions of service in a narrow sense.

In 1958, proposals were submitted to government in respect of review of salaries. This was accepted in 1959. In 1965, there was a crisis over conditions of service. During this period, the university professor according to Egbokhare (2001) was the second highest paid public servant, after the Chief

Justice of the federation. The travails of ASUU started with the regime of General Yakubu Gowon in the years following the end of the civil war. In fact, the reversal of the fortunes of academics was initiated under this regime. In 1972, government rejected a request for pay rise by ASUU. A strike was declared by ASUU in 1973 to compel the government to reconsider its position. This ended abruptly when General Gowon threatened to evict the academics from university housing.

In 1981, ASUU went on strike according to Egbokhare (2001) to press home demand for good governance and better university environment. Once more in 1988, another strike over conditions of service failed. ASUU was proscribed and its membership was intimidated and terrorized. In 1990, ASUU was deproscribed. By this time, the decadence in the universities had become evident and the academic freedom and autonomy highly eroded. Academic standards had plummeted to the point that employers of labour were beginning to sound alarm. ASUU called attention to the state of the universities and submitted a set of demands for negotiation. The union was ignored. Two years later in 1992, a strike was declared. ASUU was again proscribed, its members humiliated. Three months into the strike, the government of Ibrahim Babangida was forced to negotiate with the striking teachers, leading to a new package of condition of service and arrangement on funding and university autonomy. In 1993 and 1994, ASUU according to Egbokhare (2001) went on strike for four and six months respectively to defend sections of the 1992 agreement.

The government had failed to implement several areas of the 1993 agreement; it was manipulating the appointment of Vice Chancellors and under cutting university funds. A strike was declared in 1996 during the regime of General Sani Abacha. This strike lasted six months. In August 1999, ASUU once more called out its members on a strike following the refusal of the new regime of Olusegun Obasanjo to recognize an agreement between ASUU and the previous regime on May, 25, 1999. Having failed to secure government's attention through formal and informal channels, ASUU declared a trade dispute with government

and went on strike a few weeks later. After weeks of posturing and showmanship, the government negotiated and signed another agreement with ASUU on 26 October, 1999, after weeks of strike. The essential points of the agreement were indistinguishable from the so called “rushed agreement” of May 25, 1999 (Egbokhare, 2001).

On April 2, 2001, ASUU declared a strike after failing to get government to sign an agreement negotiated with it and concluded in December 18, 2000. Several attempts were made according to Fashina (2001) to avert the crisis by ASUU. Following the failure to gain a hearing from government, ASUU declared a trade dispute with government and proceeded on strike about four weeks later. In January 2003, ASUU went on strike for 6 months. They demanded among other things that 26 percent of the annual budget be reserved for and spent on education as is the provision of UNESCO. They demanded for structural changes in university funding and also demanded that 49 lecturers of University of Ilorin sacked for participating in an ASUU strike be recalled and reinstated to their jobs.

Between 2004 to 2013, ASUU has embarked on strike actions to force the federal government to (a) reverse the decay in the university for greater responsibility towards national development, (b) reverse the brain drain, (c) restore the Nigerian university system through massive and sustained financial intervention, (d) create a significant improvement in the living and learning conditions of our university, (e) payment of outstanding arrears etc. 2003—6months (ended in 2004), 2005—3days, 2006—1week, 2007—3months, 2008—1week, 2009—4months, 2010—5months and 1week, 2011—3month (ended in 2012), 2013—6 months. The strike actions by ASUU have really destabilized the calendar of the university system in Nigeria. The disruptions affect the quality of lesson delivery, hamper students’ performance and cause unnecessary delay in period of graduation (The Nation, 2013). This chronicle is the story of how ASUU emerged. A small pressure group that started in 1958 has become viable and potent opposition to government’s attempts at

commercializing education in Nigeria. ASUU has pledged itself to wars that it must win in order to enshrine true academic freedom and autonomy in Nigerian universities.

ASUU and its Fights for University Autonomy and Academic Freedom

In 1959, Ashby foresaw that in the nearest future, Nigeria will face the challenges of academic freedom and university autonomy, thus, Ashby cautioned through the Commission he chaired that Nigerian university system has to be insulated from the hot and cold winds of politics. Since 1960 till date, governments whether civilian or military have interfered in university administration, thus, limiting its autonomy and curtailing the academic freedom of the university teachers. The federal government especially during the military rule displayed the following according to Okorosaye-Orubite, Paulley and Abraham (2012) to show their intolerance and contempt for academic freedom and university autonomy, to which ASUU had equally responded:

- i. Appointment of cronies as Vice Chancellors in disregard for universities statues thereby establishing a reign of terror and repression on campuses. In one bizarre instance, an army General was appointed Sole Administrator of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.
- ii. Appointments, promotions and discipline of staff being single-handedly done by such cronies Vice-Chancellors, with no regard to due process. Vice-Chancellors in order to appease their military benefactors more or less surrendered the autonomy of universities.
- iii. Harassment and outright dismissal of lecturers for exercising their rights to academic freedom. For example, between 1977-79, when General Obasanjo was the military Head of State, a Vice-Chancellor in the University of Calabar arbitrarily dismissed eighteen (18) lecturers.

In spite of the above hopeless situation and threats to its members, ASUU has never ceased to take principled stands using the legal or constitutional

means to resist the onslaught of the military or civilian regimes on academic freedom and autonomy. During the 2013 ASUU National Strike, the then president of ASUU, Dr. Nasir Isa, lamented bitterly while addressing his colleagues that:

At independence in 1960, Nigeria was at par with many of the countries called the Asian Tigers from where commodity items, including palm oil, are now imported. What makes the difference is education. While the likes of Malaysia, Singapore and South Korea heavily invested in developing the capacities of their citizens, successive Nigerian governments have merely paid a lip service to education. This accumulated Neglect and half-hearted response culminated into sordid state of affairs in our University system, as recently captured by the 2012 Nigerian Universities Needs Assessment Report (The Nation, 2013).

The struggle to revitalize the university system led ASUU to table their demands to the federal government which they believe that if the government implements will strengthen Nigerian universities, make them more autonomous and enhance their competencies internationally. The agreement according to Fashina (2001) was that adequate funding be provided for new students' hostels, new academic buildings i.e. classrooms, laboratories, workshops, to procure new teaching and research equipment, new recreational facilities, new access roads, more staff housing, and maintenance of existing facilities. If the government had implemented this agreement it entered with ASUU, it would have led to the following according to Mbachu, (2001):

- i. Provided firm foundation for the restoration of the past glory of Nigerian universities. It will also attract back to Nigeria most academics that left the universities out of dissatisfaction with the conditions of service and frustration about

poverty of academic facilities in our country;

- ii. The agreement will help retain academics already in the system and also encourage the best graduates to join the academic (teaching) profession; and
- iii. The agreement would have placed our universities in good position to seriously compete with other universities in the world in the race for the production of knowledge for development and freedom.

Between the period this agreement was made till date, ASUU has made strenuous but futile efforts to persuade the Federal Government of Nigeria to implement in full the agreement it willingly entered with her. If the government had demonstrated good faith in its dealings with ASUU, by now, the Nigerian universities would have been enjoying the benefits of academic freedom and university autonomy. We shall now briefly discuss the importance and benefits of university autonomy in bringing innovation and academic excellence in the universities of nations that value the principle of academic freedom and university autonomy.

Benefits of University Autonomy

The international emphasis for academic freedom and university autonomy across the world is due to the enormous benefits inherent in the policy and practice. Akpan and Amadi (2017) summarized the benefits of university autonomy as follows:

- It encourages collaborative efforts among academic staff, school management, parents, and significant others who are poised to usher in total transformation through the learning institutions.
- It avails different universities the right to explore peculiar opportunities and to adopt special strategies, methodologies and styles in solving their peculiar challenges. In other words, stereotyping is done without. Hence, problems are rapidly tackled with workable and innovative strategies.
- It provides the parents with a wide range of opportunities to choose universities that best suit their ideologies, expectations and

religious inclinations. This freedom of choice fulfills the philosophy of a democratic and globalized society. It also guarantees happiness and opportunity for maximization of the potentials of individual learners and specific ideological groups.

- It also arouses the spirit of entrepreneurialism and excellence in teaching and research. The entrepreneurial university will not only make ground-breaking and landmark achievements in knowledge generation, they will also become highly productive and capital generating entity.
- University autonomy will also encourage judicious management of budgetary allocation to universities. The autonomous management system marked by strong, objective and independent internal audit system, maintains a high level of probity and accountability to the entire society. They also ensure the safety of physical assets of the university.
- More so, it will cause dramatic boost in academic excellence and innovation among students and there will be a reflection of that in the wider society through the graduates who will serve in various capacities in their immediate society and global level.

Conclusion

In this study, we have systematically traced the evolution of university education in Nigeria, discussed the concepts of university autonomy and academic freedom, assessed and examined the emergence of ASUU and its series of fights through strike actions to save Nigerian universities by holding the government accountable through massive and sustained financial intervention. As it stands now, the performances of the Nigerian universities seem unsatisfactory. This could be attributed to the wrangling between ASUU, the government and other stakeholders in the university education sector. If excellence must be achieved and sustained in our universities, both ASUU and the government should pay attention to the advice of Nzimiro (1975) who held that “autonomy and freedom are only validated by a dogged display of maturity, sense of responsibility, vision and clear-sighted pursuit of goals and

objectives that will, in short and long run, provide salvation and progress for the people and the nation. The universities (through the lecturers must) prove their worth. The nation (government) and people must learn to trust the universities; (for) our progress (as a state) depends on working partnership between the people ... the nation and the universities”.

We therefore recommend the repositioning of the powers of some regulatory agencies of the university such as the NUC and JAMB as well as government ministries to conform to the autonomy of universities as contained in the laws establishing universities in the country. The federal and the state governments should increase the allocation being given to universities. And our university management officers should imbibe the culture of accountability and transparency in selecting both their students and staff, thereby, insulating the university from the hot and cold winds of politics.

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