

Academic Staff Union of Universities and The Middle Level Academic Leadership in Nigerian Public Universities

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.9010307>

Received: 29 September 2024; Accepted: 04 November 2024; Published: 20 February 2025

ABSTRACT

Trade Union in Higher Education Development in Nigeria dates back to the Nigerian Association of Universities Teachers. The Union was formed mainly to attend to the welfare of University Teachers. Academic Staff Union of Universities was an offshoot of the former, but extended the struggle to check Post-Colonial State elites in Nigeria for the interest of the common people to access education and their wellbeing by providing leadership in Higher Educational Institutions. A number of studies have been carried out on the role of Trade Union in Higher Education development. Suffice it to say, that the role of Trade Unions in leadership development in Higher Educational Institutions has not been substantially investigated. This study examines Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) as a Trade Union in ensuring leadership development in Nigeria public universities. In doing this, we draw attention on how the Union has inculcated the culture of academic struggle resilience in leadership development amongst Middle Level academics in her struggle for a better higher education in the quest for more funding, academic freedom and democratization of university system. In this regard, the union through her members mentor the middle level academics in appreciating these ideas as the leeway for quality education away from the inclusions of market economy in commoditization of Higher education in Nigeria and Africa at large beyond the reach of the downtrodden. The paper recommends that the Nigerian State should continue to provide the necessary funding for Higher education, in pursuit of academic freedom and democratization of University administration leadership to avoid opportunistic liberal capitalists from taken over Higher Education.

Key words: Academic, Union, Middle-level, Leadership, Universities.

INTRODUCTION

Nationalism for Independent Africa states under colonialism led the nationalists to recognize the need for higher educational institutions that will train high level man power that will man various institutions of government in the post-colonial era. Many of the nationalists went overseas to obtain higher education, after their middle level education in missionary school at home. In this vein, Okojie (2009) observed that Higher Education in Nigeria dates back to the nineteenth century when propelled by the ideals of liberal education as introduced by the early missionaries. Nigerians sought opportunities to acquire this new and exciting vision of life, which was then only available overseas. Responding to the pressures generated by this hunger for knowledge, the colonial government established the Yaba Higher College in 1932. The college was established to provide well qualified assistants in medical, engineering and other vocations as well as teachers for secondary schools, and the then known “higher middle school. With passage of time, the college offered sub-degree courses in engineering, medicine, agriculture and teacher training to fill specific vacancies in the colonial administration. Then, the idea for the establishment of higher educational institutions that will engineer development in the colonial states was not in the agenda of colonial administrations. The higher education space was limited, only in terms of manpower that will assist the colonial administration to function. This again became part of the nationalism as the expansion of educational facilities at all levels was a critical aspiration of nationalists and independence movements around

the world in the 1940s and 1950s (Olorode, 2009). In Nigeria the pressure by the nationalists and other independence movements broke the ice beck when the University College, Ibadan was established in 1942. This was followed by the reports of the Ashby commission in the early 1960 that made recommendations for the establishment of a university in each of the (then) three regions of Nigeria-western, eastern and northern regions, and a university in the Federal Capital Territory of the time, Lagos. Since there was already a university – University College, Ibadan in the then western region, the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) was established as a child of protest arising from the minority report of Ashby Commission by Sanya Onabamino. Thus, the University of Lagos, the University of Ife, the University of Nigeria, Nsukka and Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria was established (Olorode, 2009).

Today, in the same tradition of regionalization of Federal Universities, all the thirty-six (36) states and the federal capital territory, Abuja, have at least one federal University and each of the 36 states have at least one State University and some two state universities or more. It is from these public universities that Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) as a trade union draws her membership. We therefore interrogate the role of Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) in providing leadership in terms of governance, funding and staff development that affects the leadership of the middle level academics in the Nigerian public universities.

University Education and Nationalism

The concept of university as derived from universal and its product is also expected to be universal in knowledge production. A university is therefore established to produce critical and original thinkers for knowledge production. It is not a factory for the manufacturing narrow-minded robots that fit rigidly into a specific job in the economy (as defined by the colonial administration) for the markets in capitalism. Therefore, the thinking of the nationalists was different from the colonial ideas of Higher Education. African nationalist's perspectives were evident in the mottos and the missions' statements of the first indigenous universities in Nigeria.

The University of Nigeria, Nsukka motto is to Restore the Dignity of Man, University of Ife is for "Learning and culture" and Ahmadu Bellow University, Zaria took its motto from the mission statement by its first Chancellor, Sir Ahmadu Bello thus:

The cardinal principle on which our university is founded is to impart knowledge and learning to men and women of all races, without any distinction on the ground of race, religion or political beliefs and the principle enshrined in the University law. Only through membership and freedom of inquiry and research can a university be drawn into the full ferment of thoughts from which new knowledge comes. Only if it adheres to those freedoms can it become truly great. If our staff and students are drawn from all parts of the world, then the mixture of international minds working together in an atmosphere of academic freedom can produce a university true to its ideals and meanings.

These mottos and mission statements of our first-generation universities needed considerable national efforts to actualize them. ASUU in this regard sees its role as that of defending and protecting the ideals of the nationalists in the interest of the country away from the incursion of commoditization of higher education in Nigerian State (Kano Sule, 2005).

ASUU AS NATIONALIST TRADE UNION IN NIGERIA

The Trade Union Decree 22 of 1978 now an Act of Parliament as amended grants all workers in Nigeria the rights to unionize. Also, convention 97 of the International Labour Organization (ILO) of which Nigeria is a signatory frown at the denial of workers the right to associate freely. International Labour Standard as enshrined in ILO conventions are binding on member states that have ratified them as well as in recommendations which serve as guide for national legislation.

The Academic Staff of the first-generation Universities who were partakers of the Nationalists struggle took advantage of the /Act/ Decree and ILO convention to form a trade union in the University. As a union of teachers, the focus of the union was then to maintain and develop the ideals for which the universities were established. Nigerian Association of University Teachers was formed in 1965, covering academic staff in the University of

Ibadan, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, University of Ife, Ile-Ife and University of Lagos, Lagos. NAUT's initially orientation was mainly for improvement in the conditions of service of its members, and for the socio-economic and political well-being of the country.

Though, NAUT in its actions and omissions may have neglected the ideas of protecting the ideals on which the Universities was established and went for bread and butter for its members. NAUT then hardly took any noteworthy position on national issues. Ideologically it seemed to be a middle-class fraternity with viewpoints not divergent from those of the post-colonial state elites. On the few occasions that it issued public statements they tended to be conservative and have **sympathy** for the regime in power

This posture of NAUT was totally against the role of academics as the mirror of the society especially the down trodden, that their voices are not heard and oppressed by those in state power, in most cases make policies that serves the interest of the ruling class and the center of capitalism.

Marx () posits thus:

But the desire to tell the truth is therefore only one condition for being an intellectual. The other is courage, readiness to carry on rational inquiry to wherever it may lead, to undertake ruthless criticism of everything that exists, ruthless in the sense that the criticism will not shrink either from its own conclusions or from conflict with the powers that be.

It was not far from the above position and the need for a new-nationalism to confront the post-colonial state elites in Nigeria that occasioned the need for a Vibrant Trade Union of Intellectuals. As NAUT became unsuitable for the development of the university system in Nigeria, Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) was therefore formed in 1978. The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) grew out of the Nigerian Association of University Teachers (NAUT) as it then became clear to understand that the development of the university system was a function of the socio-political and economic development of the country. To address this, it was required that ASUU must provide effective leadership within the university system to achieve three major clusters of needs; funding, democratization for academic freedom and provide leadership for middle level academics in the university and at national level.

Leadership Concepts

In conceptualizing leadership, we may leave it to those who are being led to define what leadership is and who are leaders. But for perspectives seek, leadership is both a relation and a process. It is a relation between persons who are engaged together in some cooperative activity or set of activities to achieve a common goal. From another view point, leadership is a complex process by which a person influences others to accomplish a mission, task or objective, and directs the organization in a way that makes it more cohesive and coherent

Fashina (2007) may be more nuances in qualifying leadership;

The idea that some are born leaders is questionable; leadership is acquired in the process of organizing people. Good leadership requires education, self-examination, experience, training and struggles A leader to excel, must continuously work on his performance, do a self-criticism of it, learn from errors and improve upon the practice of leadership on the basis of self-understanding and self-criticism.

In this vein, leadership is not the same thing as holding an office. A person may hold an office that gives him authority and power, but may fail to be a leader. For instance, an ASUU branch chairperson, Head of Department, Dean, Director or even Vice Chancellor of University has some powers defined by ASUU constitutions or university act, but this does not make him a leader. The chairperson is a leader if, in exercising his constitutional functions, he makes the members of the union to be disposed and to be involved in achieving the goals and objectives of ASUU. To be a leader in ASUU, a person must possess some set of attributes that motivates people do what they ought to do to realize the goals of the struggles of ASUU. (Fashina, 2007)

Indeed, ASUU achieves its goals and objectives mainly because; it is an outstanding democratic trade union in Nigeria led by leaders, not rulers, that are inspired by ideals of the nationalists for quality Higher Education away from the market place of education by the neo-liberalists. ASUU as one of the democratic, if not the most democratic trade unions in Nigeria, has no establishment, what ASUU has is a large and growing number of dedicated members (Young and old, men and women; and of all academic ranks, all ideologists) who have earned the respect (as patriots and intellectuals) of their colleagues across Nigeria. These are Nigerians who, while some of our colleagues abandoned the universities and turned into professional hagiographers, traders, point men and women of... every government in power and play the role of destroying educational sector for self) remained in the University to turn it around (Olorode, 2009). It is from this group of academics that ASUU harvest leaders and train them especially the middle level academics for higher educational leadership.

Quality Higher Educational Institutions Output and Funding

Omale (2009) in this vein states:

Where else, if not tertiary institutions, have we decided to train the bankers, the lawyers, the engineers, the doctors, the architects, the agriculturists, the accountants, the administrators, the teachers? No wonder, the UN agency recommended as high as 26% of GDP to be devoted in the budget to the education sector. The largest and most industrialized economies put education as number one in their budgets.

This is the point of departure in funding the Higher Education in Nigeria and Africa at large. What makes a university is an adequate funding of research for development. Therefore, research funding is requirement for the sustenance of Higher Education. Research funding generally covers any funding for scientific research in the areas of hard science and technology, management, Humanities and social sciences. The term often connotes funding obtained through a competitive process in which potential research projects are evaluated and only the most promising receive funding. Such processes, which are run by governments, corporations or foundations, allocated scarce funds (Olorode, 2007). Away from this kind of funding; the government has a central role in funding education in line with the United Nations recommendation of 26% of State budget to educational sector that serves as the engine of development.

It is unfortunate that while ASUU Struggle for expanded Higher Education Funding that will torch on human capital development, in Harvard University; Endowment Fund as at the end of January 2005 is valued at 22 billion dollars, whereas Nigeria's external reserve was only 40 billion dollars. During the fiscal year of 2005 the Harvard University income totaled 2.2 billion dollars The breakdown of the income of the university that year; students income -23 percent; Endowment – 5 percent; current use gifts – 7 percent; other operating income – 14 percent; and sponsored research support – 23 percent (Jones-Esan, 2009).

We may not be pushing to equal Harvard University in terms of funding the public universities in Nigeria, but asking for the intervention of government, which they can, to declare it a national necessity and comply with the 26% of national budget for education. ASUU is providing the leadership from this front for more funding in the Higher Education especially in the university. It is the quality in the Universities that will reflect the qualities of other tertiary institutions. However, successive governments have set up commissions on education. All of these commissions have recognized the centrality of education to Nigeria's development and recommended appropriate funding. Education has been conceived not in Market terms but as a tool for the total development of the human persons. This conception has however changed and been replaced with a market-driven conception of education as a result of the current market driven reform; which is contrary to Nigeria's national interest. These reforms are motivated by the World Bank and the international monetary fund (IMF). The reforms are going to widen inequality among Nigerians. This is not however to say that ASUU is opposed to reforms. ASUU only opposes commodizations of education. If government fails to provide quality education for its citizens, the private sector cannot (Kano, 2005)

In this context, Ebirima Sall (2005) lamented the commodification of education which is an unfortunate shift... the fact that more than three hundred (300) bodies are applying for university license which points to the attempt by the private business people to dominate and bastardize university education. He added that there is obvious rise in the numerical strength of institutions and enrolment without commensurate provisions in the areas of

staffing and funding. Indeed, the two dangerous dimensions that have affected the higher education development which ASUU struggle pay much attention to is staffing which requires recruiting bright graduates into the university system and adequate funding of the university to keep them on the go.

At least triple of the number of lectures in the Nigerian university system today is needed especially with the proliferation of private universities and brain drain. In the last decade or so, many of our first-class graduates shunned job offers in the university system to go and work for banks. At OAU, a first-class graduate in Economics in the last three years was employed by a bank (their first employment after degree was on a monthly salary of one million naira (about three thousand dollars). That is the three months salaries of a Professor in Nigeria. Many qualified Nigerians abroad will not return because of poor pay, bad conditions of work and lack of facilities (Scholar, 2009). There is no doubt that every government in Nigeria recognizes the importance of education, especially higher education that produces the man power that feed into low levels of educational institutions, but the point is that politics sounds more in concept than action. This is where ASUU differs with the government in terms of funding education. Education should not be used to play politics. No society develops without paying attention to education or handing over her higher educational institutions to the dictates of extra-national forces.

Jones – Esan (2009) then opined that the primary issue to settle regarding university education in Nigeria is to decide the quality of university degrees we wish to award. It is the quality of the universities that will reflect the qualities of other tertiary institutions. Indeed, ASUU as a trade union anchor the struggle on three things; (1) Academic Freedom to produce knowledge that is universals (2) Funding of the university; and (3) democratization of university leadership. ASUU therefore socializes the middle level academics in this ideology of leadership. +

RESISTING ANTI-ACADEMIC FREEDOM IN NIGERIA UNIVERSITIES

Without academic freedom on our campuses the whole essence of university as a center of knowledge production is meaningless. This very important aspect of university and higher education came under attack under the military regimes which other democratic governments in Nigeria try to copy. It began on April 21, 1978 when the students of Ahmadu Bello University, held a Rally in the main campus at Samaru in memory of their colleagues killed by armed police and soldiers (at University of Ibadan in 1971, and four students at Ife in 1981) during, the 1978 student s revolt, known as “Ali Must Go”. The revolt was in reaction to the over 100 percent increase in education cost imposed by the General Obasanjo’s government. About ten students, mostly from ABU died (ASUU, 1986).

The Abisoye panel report on the ABU students killing described the police action as barbaric, reprehensive and unwarranted, yet no government official was indicted. As in the 1978 student’s killings, the panel found easy scapegoats in radical lecturers at ABU, who teach “What they are not paid to teach”. The government white paper also empowered the Minister of Education to flush out all such lecturers without any option of trials (ASUU, 1986) Many Academic Staff were sacked and some deported illegally to stop them from teaching what they are not p aid to teach as in the Athenian State when Socrates was accused of corrupting the minds of the youth.

Indeed, this was against the Kampala Declaration on Intellectual Freedom and Social Responsibility (1990). Section A of the declarations on Intellectual Rights and Freedom states that “No African Intellectual shall in any way be persecuted, harassed or intimidated for reasons only of his/her Intellectual Work, Opinions, gender, nationality, ethnicity. Also, Section B, on rights to form autonomous organizations, under Articles 10, states that;

“All members of the Intellectual Community shall have the freedom of Association, including the right to form and join Trade Unions, the right of association includes of peaceful assembly and formation of groups, clubs and national and international associations”.

While Section C: on Autonomy of Institutions, Articles 11 and 12, went further to state that “Institutions of Higher Education shall be autonomous of the State or any other public authority in conducting their affairs,

including the administration and setting up their academic teaching, research and other related programmers. Also, the autonomy of institutions of higher education shall be exercised by democratic means of self-government, involving active participation of all members of the respective academic community (Kampala 1990).

The state on her part in all ramifications of academic freedom and autonomy of governance in higher education institutions is obliged to protect these rights because academic freedom is linked to democracy and human rights.

As in the old, no state gives rights freely; majorly the intellectuals always lead the struggle for freedom. Most periods of history, civil rights granted by governments were often altered or withdrawn at will which had led to continued struggles for freedom. One of the great influences on freedom struggles; we may recall is the Greek philosopher Socrates (470 – 399 BC) whose views and teachings were seen as a corrupting influence on the morals of the youth of Athens, which caused great consternation among political and religious leaders of the Greek State. His plea before the jury that eventually convicted him remains one of the most eloquent defenses of freedom thus *“If you offered to let me off this time on the condition that I am not any longer to speak my mind in this search for wisdom, and that if I am caught doing this again, I shall die I should say to you; men of Athens, I shall obey the God rather than you. While I have life and strength, I shall never cease to follow philosophy and to exhort and persuade any one of you whom I happen to meet. For this, be assured the God commands... and Athenians, I should go on to say, either acquit me or not, but understand that I shall never do it differently, even if I have to die for it many times”* (Awake, 1986).

In the foregoing context, ASUU is in the same page with Socrates, and it is interesting to note that it is not just about anybody thinks she knows what universities should be doing and what they should not be doing, who will and how to publish, what lecturers should teach or not teach etc. (The National Scholar, 2009). It is the resilience of ASUU in the struggle for academic freedom and autonomy that put her forward as the most formidable trade union in Nigeria, all to address better higher educational institutions and the larger socio-economic and political rights of Nigerians.

HIGHER EDUCATION AND FUNDING IN NIGERIA

Higher education quagmire in Nigeria can be generally summarized in death of funding education by the state. There is no doubt that educational sector especially higher education has the key to human capital development, and no State with her right senses can toil with funding education. However, since the 1970s the World Bank has been pushing the heretical idea that the return to the State as compared to the individual beneficiary is highest in elementary education and lowest in higher education, and therefore the State must, in the name of Structural Adjustment, increase allocation of resources to elementary education at the expense of Higher Education.

The import of this, is the current disaster in the university funding in Nigerian which translated to the lamentation of the situation in rating Universities whereby no African university made the list of the best 200 universities in the world and that a few made the list of the top 500, for Nigeria, no university is ranked among the first 40 in Africa. Obafemi Awolowo University then the highest-ranking University in Nigeria is ranked number 44 in Africa and 5,834 in the world, while university of Ibadan, Nigeria's premier university, is ranked number 66 in Africa and 6,809 in the world. With this ranking several universities in south African as well as other African countries not as endowed as Nigeria in financial and human resources (Like Zimbabwe, Botswana, Senegal, Sudan, Burkinafaso, Nambia and even Rwanda and Somalia) are ranked ahead of Nigeria. Even the polytechnic of Nambia is ranked number 32 in Africa” (Jones –Esan, 2009). This boils down to the point of funding the higher education in Nigeria.

As Olorode (2009) pointed out; “We must not pretend not to know that the crisis in public funded education in Nigeria is evolving in the ambiance of the debate on the neo-liberalism and that the debates are committed one way or the other because of their interest in the situation on ground concerning the role of the state in public welfare; social services provision, deregulation, etc. Be all these as they may; however, useful debates can only occur when we seek knowledge of the facts that pertain to the issues at hand”.

Therefore, the issue for avoidance of any doubts, is the centrality of demands for better funding of education is ASUU'S agitation since 1982. ASUU has been consistently creative on this matter. The establishment of Education Trust Fund(ETF), the restoration fund and stabilization fund, and the suggestions for the establishment of properties company for the universities to own the federal governments' properties.... were all initiatives of ASUU. When some of these were established, they became sources which some ministers and bureaucrats loot or expropriate to feather their own nests, in spite of ASUU'S struggle to protect those funds (National Scholar, 2009).

Despite the pitfalls of those in government using the ideas of ASUU, in the area of fund to enrich themselves and political party patrons, the idea of the establishment of TETFUND and NEEDS assessment for universities have been novel in the funding of higher education in Nigeria. The Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFUND) was established by an act of the National Assembly in June 2011. The act replaced the Education Tax Fund act cap. E4 Laws of the federation of Nigeria 2004 and Education Tax Fund (Amendment) Act. NO 17, 2003. The fund was set up to administer and disburse education tax collections to the public tertiary education institutions in Nigeria defined under the act as universities, polytechnics and colleges of education. The main source of income available to the fund is the 2% education tax paid from the assessable profit of companies registered in Nigeria. The tax is collected by the Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS)" (TETFUND, 2017).

TETFUND is an interventionist institution for funding Higher Education away from the normal **retune** yearly budget for Ministry of Education for the funding of educational sector. Its core areas of interventions are provision of essential physical infrastructural for teaching and learning; 2) provision of instructional materials and equipment; 3) research, book development and publication (journals and books) ; 4) Academic staff training and development; and 5) any other needs, which in the opinion of the board of trustees is critical and essential for the improvement of quality and maintenance of standards in the educational institution (TETFUND, 2017). The enabling act establishing the FUND prescribes the distribution of the FUNDS in the Ratio 2:1:1 respectively to universities, polytechnics and colleges of education (COE's) (TETFUND 2017).

Despite this intervention through tax regime, the needs of Higher Education especially universities in the area of funding is not still something to mention. This led to NEEDS assessment of the universities initiated by ASUU to capture the needed resources required to make Nigerian Universities to function effectively and reposition the Nigerian universities. This necessitated the NEEDS assessment report in Nigerian universities for an enabling environment to be provided for our universities, to be well-funded. The NEEDS Assessment report from ASUU and government sides revealed that Nigeria Universities needs more funds.

As Biodun (2018) captured;

As of 2017 when we were forced to go on strike, we found out that the government was not keeping fate with what they agreed to do in 2013, particularly in the area of funding. We told the government that the universities were in a serious state of dilapidation and from our estimates we put the revitalization cost at ₦1.6tn. But the government said it needed to verify how we arrived at the amount. So, the government went out in 2012 to carry out the NEEDS assessment verification in our universities. They visited 73 Public Universities in Nigeria-federal and state, and they came back to analyze the report.

Furthermore;

If you saw the report, it was so worrying. We had even first-generation universities which did not have even water in their laboratories. Rooms meant for four to six students were being occupied by 20 students, among other inadequacies. Libraries had empty shelves and computers were down. The government felt alarmed. The report was presented to the National Economic Council so that both the federal and state government could see the decay in the university system. So, the government committee put the estimate of revitalization funds at ₦1.3tn, not too from our estimates. And we were ready to go with that – that was in 2013. And the government agreed with us that ₦1.3tn would be injected into the universities over six years, stating with ₦220bn in 2013. But it took the government three years to even release ₦200bn out of the agreed ₦1.3tn leaving the outstanding of ₦1.1tn" (Biodun, 2018).

The import of all these is that, without funding, mentors and mentees cannot function in the universities for their optimum development. Funds will enable the university attend to the following:

“Research project deemed important for national development, Inter-Institutional Central Science Laboratory Systems for special research equipment; procurement and maintenance of research equipment in individual Institutions; post graduate Training in Nigeria and abroad; Library Development including the establishment and maintenance of a Central Research Library and a Higher Education Library System; Higher Education Book Development System; Academic Conferences in Nigeria and abroad; International Academic Research Cooperation Projects; Establishment of Research Institutes; Establishment of Industrial application linkages and research-based cottage industries by public tertiary institutions; Out-Standing Postgraduate Research Project in Public Tertiary Institutions; Post-Doctoral Research Projects in Public Tertiary Institutions: Basic Research on the Biological Physical, Social and Cultural Environment; and Applied Research to resolve human and Societal Problems of Technology, Agriculture, medicine, Humanities and the Social Sciences (ASUU, 2009).

These requirements are necessary because those who are to mentor the mentees needs the resources and enabling environment to produce knowledge that is universal for human development. The middle level academics are the target groups to man the higher educational institutions when all these are developed to full capacity, institutions in Nigeria can then compete with their counterparts all over the world.

ASUU AND THE DEMOCRATIZATION OF UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA

Why is ASUU interest in the democratization of the university system? The answer is readily available because the autocracy and military dictatorship in Africa has made democracy, alternative governance regime if put side by side for now. Although, democracy continues to be one of the most widely used concepts but it tends to convey different impressions to different individuals at different times and places. What is undeniable is that it is based on a process of free choice of rulers by the ruled (Toyo 2000).

This may also be contestable, if one asks the pertinent questions, are the ruled actually involved in the process that leads to the point of free choices. The elites present candidates under the political party platforms, and ask the ruled to make choices. Whether the choice is A or B the two aspires to maintain the elite interest. So the choice made by the ruled is to give the elites legitimacy to rule over them.

Apart from this observation on democracy, certain other features such as freedom of speech, freedom of Assembly rule of law and accountability are indispensable to the concept and practice of democracy (Tayo, 2000). ASUU as a Trade Union is amiable to democracy on the issues of freedom and accountability in the governance of Higher Educational Institutions in Nigeria. In this regard, the union have achieved limited success in the governance system of the university in terms of autonomous governance and freedom in the election of leaders in the university governance system. The council, senate and congregation of the universities are the highest governing bodies in the universities. The external members of the council are mainly appointed by the visitor of the university, but majority of the internal members are academic staff, elected from the senate (4 members) and congregation (one or two). The two Deputy Vice Chancellors are also members of the council by the virtue, that they were elected by the senate of the university made up of academic staff. Therefore, the council, senate and the congregation become the platform for the development of middle level academics in the university leadership.

TRADE UNION LEADERSHIP AND DEMOCRATIZATION

ASUU is one of the democratic Trade Union in Nigeria, which stands out for their principles. But we may ask, what is principles or ASUU principles? First, Iyayi (2013) guides us thus, principles express the fundamental beliefs or ideals (may be democratic ideals) that individuals use in action. Such beliefs or ideals not only help individuals in deciding between rights and wrong but also in making decisions that involve right versus right. In a sense, principles are also values. Values or principles help us arrange our beliefs in a hierarchy of importance. This means that when we have to choose between two sets of beliefs that are of equal importance principles or values function as tie-breakers.... Examples of principles are integrity, honesty, loyalty, patriotism, commitment, hard work, professionalism, excellence and so on.

As Iyayi (2013:15) further observed;

“In a very important sense although principles represent the decisions of the leaders of an organization about what is deemed to be important; these decisions often flow from the nature of the organization and its reasons for being. Therefore, principles cannot be formulated at any particular time outside of a thorough understanding of what the organization does, its role in society, where it is coming from and where it hopes to go. This position applies to all organizations and especially our union, Asuu”

Where ASUU is coming from, is to move away from the burden of colonialism and post-colonial elites in state governance that serves self away from collectivity of citizenship are our goals;

1. Built a free and just Nigeria, Africa and the world
2. A Sound Educational System
3. A productive, autonomous university system where academic freedom reigns
4. Promotion of research and knowledge
5. Defences and promotion of the socio-economic and cultural interest of the nation
6. Defences of trade union rights of all Nigerian workers
7. Opposition to all injustices and all unjust discrimination based on class, gender, ethnic and religious grounds of all people.

These goals of ASUU are majorly built on the principles of the union, and members are socialized ideological to imbibe them within the university administration and leadership or at national level, if they found themselves in positions of governance in the state. Our members are drawn from public universities. Federal and state own universities in Nigeria. Private owned universities are run within the context of market economy, and as usual capitalists abhor unionism. Nigerian public universities are funded by federal and states government.

There are over 48 state owned universities and 43 Federal Universities which are the public universities. Out of the public universities, some are military, para-military and special universities that their staff is not members of ASUU. They include; Nigerian Defences Academy, Kaluna; Nigerian Army University, Bui; Air Force Institute of Technology, Kaduna; Nigeria Police Academy, Wudil, and National Open University of Nigeria. ASUU therefore draws her members from public universities. Although, Academic staff members of the five universities may not join ASUU in the struggle for actions, they have sympathy for the union because they were or are members of the union in their former institutions, before joining the regimented military and para-military universities.

In short, majority of the top and middle-level academics in leadership in those institutions are from the other 86 public universities that are ASUU Branches. Invariably, the public universities and members of ASUU train and provides leadership in most universities in Nigeria including private owned universities. At the union level, the leadership and followership principles that guide actions of the organization are inculcated to members through its leadership structure mainly manned by middle academics.

Figure1. Asuu Structure and Leadership

National Delegates Conference (NDC)
National Executive Council
Zonal Leadership Under Zonal Coordinator

Branch (es) (Charter, Observer and Ascending Branches) Leaders

Congress of Branches

Our Trade Union is a grass root organization with strong internal democracy and leadership that sprouts from branch congresses to the top leadership in decision-making. It can be said to be bottom-Top Union as the Branch Congresses are supreme in decision-making and actions. Branch congresses are made up of members of the union in each branch. The chairperson and the Excos form the leadership, in each branch. But they are guided by the congress resolutions which they pass on to higher leadership at the zonal level for processing for onward passage to the National Executive Council (NEC).

Iyayi (2013) in this vein stated;

“ASUU adheres to and applies the principle of Internal Democracy rigorously. This principle is active in our discussions at the NEC; it is applied when we insist that the inputs of the branches and not principal officers of the union should provide the basis for the decisions of the National Executive Council. We produce tons of information for our members so that they can stay informed and contribute to the decisions of the union”

At the zonal level, the zonal coordinator guides the branches under the zone mainly made up of five to six branches. The zonal coordinator with the chairpersons of branches in the zone tackle the challenges within the zone majorly internal crisis within branches in Jaw-Jaw and/or management of the various labor crisis in universities within the zone and report to principal officers and zonal coordinators meeting for onward presentation to National Executive Council (NEC). This level of the union organ also prepares middle level academics for leadership. The National Executive Council (NEC) is the melting point of ASUU Leadership training. It is made up of Trustees, principal officers, Branch chairpersons, zonal coordinators, conveners of NEC Committees, resource persons and observers. This is the second highest level of ASUU leadership where critical decisions are taken democratically under intensive debates and the superior positions are adopted as resolutions. NEC’s decisions are made available to branches who normally comply because it is the input from branches that guides the NEC resolutions. The apex of the union leadership structure is the National Delegates Conference (NDC). NDC is not regular as NEC meetings. It is conducted once in two years mainly to take stock of the union activities. Observer branches that met the requirements of the union are chartered; principal officers are elected; critical decision is made in form of constitutional amendment if need be. Members of the National Delegate conference are elected in the congress of branches, and the number to be elected in each branch depends on the size of members in each branch. From the organizational leadership structure ASUU as a trade union have levels of leadership training that impact on the university leadership.

The leadership training by mentors of our union to mentees in the middle level academics in the university is built around one word “patriotism” Just like the Nationalists were during Anti-colonial struggle for the interest of African people, today we are against the ruling class, stooges of imperialists.

This what Iyayi (2013) captured;

When asked to describe our union, the characterization that we must hear from both our friends and enemies whether local or international is that ASUU is a patriotic and anti-imperialist organization. This is true. We love our country. We understand the needs, anxieties, dreams and aspirations of the Nigerian people. We know that our country has great potential to provide the best experience of life possible anywhere in the world to its people. We have worked tirelessly to enable Nigerian people realize this potential. Being intellectual workers, we also know why with the potential to be the richest nation on earth, we are the thirteenth poorest. We know that global capitalism with the collaboration of the country’s ruling class is determined that we should not achieve our potential. It is for this reason that we are opposed to the policies, programmers and practices of the ruling political class in Nigeria.

It is this new nationalism in our Trade Union that our members imbibe as leaders and potential leaders at the university and national levels.

CONCLUSION

There is no gainsaying that academics and indeed, their Trade Union is indispensable in this new era of Internal Colonialism by the ruling elite, to stand and say no to rubbish policies in a weak civil society like ours that affects Higher Educational Development. The Union has made successes in mentoring middle level academics to imbibe the principles of ASUU which we summarized in one word patriotism away from the appendages of neo-colonialism that wants to put down higher educational development in favor of elementary and middle level education.

We have over the decades resisted poor funding, anti-academic freedom and democratization of governance in all levels of university administration. In the course of this resistance our members, majorly middle level academics are ruggedly trained and mentored to stand and say no to the brute forces of government and our colleagues in the management who are put there by the power elite. We mentor our middle level academics, the future leaders in the university to learn from the history of our union leaders who in most cases pay daring prices.

Our union is frequently banned. Our members are frequently arrested and detained. Legislations are also used to threaten the union by rubber stamp Legislative Assembly we have. The Head of Departments, Deans and Professors are at the mercy of the Vice Chancellors for doing what is right.

Iyayi (2013) stated;

Our leaders at all levels are regularly brutalized; our chairpersons and some members of the executive committees are regularly sacked from their jobs; our presidents and principal officers are often detained and sacked. Under Babangida, Professor Attahiru Jega, Dr. Frank Dimowo Myself (Iyayi) shared 555 cells in Lagos because of our roles in the union. Dr. Assiss Asobie was sacked from his job while he was our past National President. For years while he continued to serve the Union at the highest level, he had no salary. He paid the price for his courage.

It is this spirit of doggedness and resistance that our members mainly dominated by middle level academics that the union socialize them into this ideology. The three thrusts of the union struggle; funding academic democratization for good governance and academic excellence are also inculcated.

We have always insisted on three things; academic excellence, a democratized system of governance and academic freedom. We have insisted that to be fruitful our intellectual practice must receive the support of and in turn encourage and promote the striving of a just and humane society. We have insisted that governance means erecting a fence of principles around the monsters and would be monsters in the seats of power, it means insisting on ground rules that establish both the responsibilities and limits of power. We have insisted that academic freedom is the air and soil that nurture academic excellence and without both the intellectual cannot and does not exist (Iyayi, 2013).

It is these principles that the union plant in the middle level academics that even our friends and foes admire that when important jobs in the State needs men of principles, the power elite usual falls back on ASUU leaders for such appointments. Ours is to mentor middle level academics that are patriotic in university and national leadership for Nigeria and Africa development at large. We therefore recommend that the Nigerian State should continue to provide the necessary funding for Higher Education in pursuit of Research for development, academic freedom and democratization of university leadership to avoid opportunistic liberalists from taken over Higher Education in Nigeria.

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