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An Assessment of ASUU Strikes since 1999 and Their Impact on Medical Education in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: Since the return to democracy in Nigeria in 1999, the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) has undertaken multiple strike actions to advocate for increased university funding, academic autonomy, and improved staff welfare. These strikes have severely disrupted academic calendars, particularly affecting medical education, which relies on uninterrupted clinical training. This study presents a quantitative analysis of ASUU strike durations from 1999 to 2025, along with a qualitative assessment of their impact on medical training. Sixteen strikes were identified, with an average duration of 3.46 months and the longest lasting 9 months in 2020. Informal focus group discussions among medical faculty revealed institutional challenges, including disrupted postings, social mistrust among staff, and student disengagement. Recommendations include establishing protected medical calendars, compensating academic work during strikes, and fostering stakeholder collaboration to mitigate disruption in medical education.

Keywords: Academic disruption, ASUU, Medical education, Nigeria, Strikes.

Introduction

The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) is the main body representing academic staff in Nigerian public universities and has frequently embarked on strikes since 1999 (Adesulu and Ogunjimi, 2022), primarily to address issues such as university funding, lecturer welfare, and institutional autonomy (Adesulu and Ogunjimi, 2022; Uzendu *et al.*, 2024). Despite Nigeria's return to democracy, which was expected to reduce such disruptions after years of military rule, strikes have persisted and continue to disrupt academic calendars, affecting students and faculty alike (BBC News Pidgin, 2024; Offor *et al.*, 2024; Ewa and Eze, 2023; Odoh and Nwokwu, 2024). ASUU remains a key stakeholder in the nation's higher education system, using industrial actions to push for systemic reforms (Uzendu *et al.*, 2024).

Medical education is grounded in hands-on training through clinical rotations and postings, which ensure the acquisition of psychomotor skills (National Medical Commission, 2018). These rotations are considered sacrosanct (National Medical Commission, 2018, 2019) due to their specific number, content, sequence, duration, and uniqueness (Medical and Dental Council of Nigeria, 2022; National Medical Commission, 2019). They are universally accepted with any major deviation resulting in invalidation of the training and subsequent non-registration of graduated students by the various Medical councils (Australian Medical Council, 2012; General Medical Council, 2018; Liaison Committee on Medical Education, 2024; Medical and Dental Council of Nigeria, 2022; Medical Council of Hong Kong, 2020; National Medical Commission, 2018, 2019; University of Medicine, Yangon, 2016). Thus, medical education can only be minimally adjusted in terms of duration if enforced school closures result from strikes.

Although medical schools have attempted to shield their students from the uncertainties of strike actions, these efforts have been largely ineffective in public universities in Nigeria. Postings and examinations have been disrupted by union picketing, as well as enforced evacuation by school authorities from the hostel

accommodation. This paper assesses the pattern of ASUU strikes from 1999 to 2025, analysing their frequency and durations, and evaluates their specific impact on medical schools. It combines data review with qualitative insights from informal faculty discussions to propose sustainable mitigation strategies.

Methodology

Data collection: This analysis focuses on strikes from 1999 to the present, as of June 2025, based on available data. Data were gathered from various online sources, including news outlets such as Punch Newspapers (Adesulu and Ogunjimi, 2022) and BBC News Pidgin (2024), as well as research platforms like Nwanyanwu *et al.* (2023) and Dataphyte (Kareem, 2022). The analysis involved compiling a list of strikes since 1999, converting all durations to months for consistency (assuming 1 month = 30 days, 1 week = 7 days), and calculating the mean duration. Durations reported in weeks or days were converted to months for uniformity. Where exact end dates were unclear, approximations were made based on reported periods (e.g., "August to September" was assumed to be 1.5 months). Nineteen websites and data sources were utilised for this study (AJLS, n.d.; Kareem, 2022; Nwanyanwu *et al.*, 2023; Vanguard, 2022).

Qualitative insights: Informal focus group discussions were held with medical faculty at the University of Benin during departmental meetings, social gatherings, and clinical sessions. These discussions explored perceived challenges, adaptations, and solutions related to strike periods.

Results

Number of strikes since 1999: Based on the review, 16 ASUU strikes have been recorded since 1999. This figure is supported by a Punch Newspapers article from 2022, which states "ASUU embarked on 16 strikes in 23 years" since 1999, covering up to 2022 (Adesulu and Ogunjimi, 2022). Further, a BBC News Pidgin article from August 2024 confirms no strikes occurred in 2023, stating "2023 remain di only year wey ASUU no go strike" for the past decade, and no mention of a 2024 strike, suggesting the list is complete up to June 2025 (BBC News Pidgin, 2024).

Duration and longest strike: Research suggests that the mean duration is approximately 3.21 months, calculated from a total of around 51.37 months across 16 strikes. The 2020 strike, which lasted eight months, stands out as the longest, although some sources mention an eight-month strike in 2022, suggesting possible discrepancies in reporting. It seems likely that the exact numbers could vary slightly depending on the source, as some strikes had unclear end dates or durations reported in weeks/days. The evidence suggests that 16 strikes is accurate, but for the most precise data, it is recommended to check multiple reports.

Summary of ASUU strikes (1999–2025): A total of 16 strikes were recorded. The average duration was 3.46 months, with the longest in 2020 (9 months). The 2022 strike lasted 8 months. A summary of all strikes and durations is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of ASUU strikes since 1999, with duration converted to months where necessary

Year	Duration (Reported)	Duration (Months, Approximated)	Reason for the Strike Action
1999	5 months	5.00	Failure of negotiations over working conditions
2001	3 months	3.00	Reinstatement of 49 lecturers sacked at the University of Ilorin
2002	2 weeks	0.47	Failure to implement the previous agreement
2003	6 months	6.00	Non-implementation of previous agreements on funding and salaries
2005	2 weeks	0.47	Disruption, the specific reason is not detailed
2006	1 week	0.23	Warning strike, extended, reasons similar to previous
2007	3 months	3.00	Specific reason not detailed
2008	1 week	0.23	Reinstatement of 49 lecturers and improved salary scheme
2009	4 months	4.00	Led to the 2009 ASUU/FG agreement, the specific reason was not detailed
2010	Over 5 months	5.00	Failure to implement the 2009 agreement (approximated as 5 for calculation)

2011	59 days	1.97	2009 agreement, funding, and retirement age limit
2013	5 months, 15 days	5.50	Retirement age, funding, and budgetary allocations
2017	August 17 to September	1.50	Unresolved issues with the Federal Government (assumed 1.5 months)
2018	Indefinite, started Nov 4	3.00	Government inaction (reported as 3 months in sources)
2020	Over 9 months	9.00	Failure to implement the 2019 agreement, which was extended due to the pandemic
2022	Close to 3 months	8.00	Specific reason not detailed (corrected to 8 months based on BBC, Feb 14 to Oct 14)

Source: Adapted from multiple sources

Note: The 2022 duration was initially listed as "close to 3 months" in Punch, but was later clarified as 8 months (February 14 to October 14) in BBC News Pidgin, suggesting a possible discrepancy in reporting. For consistency, the 8-month duration is used, aligning with the period from February to October 2022.

Calculation of mean duration: To calculate the mean duration, the total duration in months is summed and divided by the number of strikes:

Total duration = 5 + 3 + 0.47 + 6 + 0.47 + 0.23 + 3 + 0.23 + 4 + 5 + 1.97 + 5.5 + 1.5 + 3 + 9 + 8 = 55.37 months.

Number of strikes = 16

Mean duration = $55.37 / 16 \approx 3.46$ months

This calculation includes the corrected 2022 duration of 8 months, adjusting from the earlier estimate of 51.37 months (which used 3 months for 2022).

Identification of the longest strike: The longest strike since 1999 is the 2020 strike, which lasted eight months, as reported in multiple sources, including Punch Newspapers (Adesulu and Ogunjimi, 2022), The Sun Nigeria (2020), and Diaphite (Kareem, 2022). The 2022 strike, at 8 months, is the second longest (Channels Television, 2022), but did not exceed 2020.

Informal focused group discussions report: This report summarizes insights from informal focus group discussions examining the impact of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) strike actions on medical education. The conversations highlighted systemic disruptions, stakeholder dynamics, and recommendations for preserving the integrity of medical training.

Findings:

- *Non-recognition of academic efforts during strikes:* Instances were reported where medical lecturers continued clinical teaching during ASUU strike periods but were neither acknowledged nor remunerated by the university, leading to frustration and institutional distrust.
- *Undermining of academic activities by students:* Medical students have been known to inform ASUU-member parents or guardians of planned academic activities, leading to targeted disruptions of scheduled examinations or postings by union picketing teams.
- *Strained intra-union relationships:* Medical lecturers, to minimize the impact of strikes on training, have been viewed by some ASUU colleagues as saboteurs. This has led to strained relationships and reduced cohesion within the university. Medical lecturers were, on average, paid less than others from the earned academic allowances that were paid following the strikes. The quotation "Monkey dey work, Baboon dey chop" was raised multiple times.
- *Inadequate accommodation for clinical students:* There are not enough accommodation facilities for clinical students within the hospitals where their clinical rotations take place, exposing students to the full effects of university-wide disruptions.
- *Premature campus exodus by students:* Students have been known to vacate campus and discontinue clinical postings even before official announcements of closure during strike periods, adversely affecting academic continuity.
- *Increased workload for medical lecturers post-strike:* Medical lecturers often face intensified workloads post-strike, as they attempt to condense clinical postings, lectures, and tutorials within reduced academic time frames to prepare students for examinations.
- *Need for a hospital-based clinical hostel:* There is a recognized need for a dedicated clinical hostel within hospitals to enhance access to clinical training and insulate students from strike-related interruptions.
- *Current academic lag:* Many public medical schools in Nigeria are approximately two academic years behind schedule, primarily due to strike-related disruptions.
- *Potential of CCMAS adoption:* Full adoption of the Core Curriculum Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS) would enhance academic standardization, reduce variation, and ensure continuity despite external disruptions.

- *Formation of NAMDA:* The establishment of the Nigerian Association of Medical and Dental Academics (NAMDA) has contributed positively by advocating for uninterrupted medical education. However, its leadership must improve collaboration with broader stakeholders, including ASUU and university management, to optimize its impact and legitimacy.
- *Need for unified stakeholder engagement:* There is a critical need for strategic collaboration among ASUU, university authorities, medical lecturers, and student representatives to design policies and frameworks that protect medical education from external shocks.

The general conclusion was that ASUU strike actions have had a multifaceted impact on medical education at the University of Benin. Although medical lecturers have made significant efforts to sustain training, the lack of systemic protection and institutional support continues to impede progress. Stakeholder dialogue, policy reforms, and infrastructural upgrades are essential to safeguard academic continuity and student well-being.

The recommendations were as listed:

- Recognize and compensate academic work carried out during strike periods.
- Develop protected academic timelines for professional medical training.
- Construct a clinical hostel within the University of Benin Teaching Hospital (UBTH) premises.
- Implement CCMAS fully in the medical school curriculum.
- Foster improved cooperation between NAMDA leadership, ASUU, and other academic bodies.
- Establish mental health support and workload regulation for the medical faculty.
- Convene regular stakeholder forums to address disruptions in medical education proactively.

Discussion

The analysis reveals a mean duration of approximately 3.46 months, indicating that ASUU strikes typically last several months, significantly disrupting academic activities (Uzendu *et al.*, 2024). The longest strike in 2020, lasting eight months (The Sun Nigeria, 2020), highlights the severity of disputes during that period, possibly exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and government inaction (Channels Television, 2022; Premium Times, 2020; The Sun Nigeria, 2020). Discrepancies in reporting, such as the 2022 strike duration (initially reported as "close to 3 months" vs. 8 months), suggest the need for cross-referencing multiple sources to ensure accuracy. The absence of strikes in 2023 and 2024, as confirmed by recent reports, indicates a potential shift (The Cable, 2024), though threats of strikes in 2025 suggest ongoing tensions (Blueprint Newspapers, 2025).

Findings from the focus group discussion reveal ongoing challenges in efforts by medical lecturers to provide solutions. School authorities should support these efforts for them to have any lasting effect. Unilateral actions are at best merely salutary and require concerted united efforts by all stakeholders. There is also a distrust of the government's adherence to its agreements, particularly regarding university funding and autonomy (The Guardian Newspapers, 2022; Business Day, 2022; This Day, 2022).

The recommendations from the discussions showed that there are hardships across board for both students and lecturers (Anazodo *et al.*, 2024; Moses and Ogbomah, 2023). The government must uphold agreements mutually reached with ASUU. If there are challenges with meeting them, they should be actively discussed and all stakeholders engaged rather than ignored (The Nation, 2021). Various sources reveal the extent of these disruptions and their importance in our polity, as evidenced by headline news reports from multiple outlets (Daily Trust, 2020; Leadership Newspaper, 2020; Nigerian Tribune, 2022; Premium Times, 2017; Pulse Nigeria, 2020; Punch Newspapers, 2013; Sahara Reporters, 2022; Vanguard, 2011). The educational sector cannot continue to cope with these disruptions at our public universities, as they adversely affect both national development and planning (Ogunode *et al.*, 2022).

The medical students play a crucial role in ensuring the effectiveness of these options. They are known to bear the deleterious adverse effects of these strikes, which unnecessarily extend their time in school (Anazodo *et al.*, 2024; Moses and Ogbomah, 2023). Whilst they are known to develop burnout, depression, financial and emotional stress, it would be great if students were educated on efforts for mitigation by the lecturers, so that they can actively support these efforts. By fostering a collaborative environment, both students and faculty can work together to implement strategies that address these challenges.

Limitations

The analysis relies on publicly available data, which may have gaps, especially for strikes with indefinite or unclear end dates (e.g., 2018 listed as "indefinite"). Conversions from weeks to months introduce approximations, and some durations (e.g., "over 5 months") were estimated for calculation purposes. Future research could benefit from official ASUU records for precise durations. Formal focus group discussions with a clear-cut agenda and with more targeted representation would provide more options and ensure stakeholder participation.

Conclusion

From 1999 to 2025, ASUU has carried out 16 strikes, averaging 3.46 months each. These disruptions notably impact medical education, prolonging student timelines, overburdening staff, and diminishing training quality. Institutional reforms, stakeholder engagement, and infrastructural upgrades are vital to safeguard medical education from recurring industrial actions. These findings highlight the ongoing challenges within Nigeria's university system, emphasising the need for sustained dialogue to minimise future disruptions.

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